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# Cultural Disobedience as The Work of Change

A Case Study of the Landelijk Missionair Collectief (LMC) in the Netherlands as an examination of the connections between voluntary simplicity, sustainable development and religion

by

**Ineke Catharina Lock**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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*Before we can create a new world we must first unearth and destroy the myths and realities, the lies and propaganda which have been used to oppress, enslave, incinerate, gas, torture and starve the human beings of this planet. Facing the lies of history is a basic human responsibility. It is unpleasant to do, but liberating to accomplish. It liberates all of us.*

*(I)f we refuse to face any of our awkward and deepest truths, then sooner or later, we are going to have to become deaf and blind. And then, eventually, we are going to have to silence our dreams, and the dreams of others. In other words, we die. We die in life.*

*In the silent world, in the shadow world, there are always people dreaming of changing the configuration.*

Ben Okri

*It is theft for me to take any fruit I do not need, or to take it in a larger quantity than is necessary. We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves.*

Mahatma Ghandi

*Freedom is the ability to resist temptation.*

Connie Palmen

**University of Alberta**

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Cultural Disobedience as the Work of Change: A Case Study of the Landelijk Missionair Collectief (LMC) in the Netherlands as an examination of the connections between voluntary simplicity, sustainable development and religion submitted by Ineke Catharina Lock in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date: 20 September 1999

This thesis is dedicated to
my big brother, Mart,
whose courage in living his life to the fullest
is an inspiration.

Deze scriptie is opgedragen aan
mijn grote broer, Mart,
die door zijn moed om intens te leven
een ware inspiratiebron is.

# ABSTRACT

Sustainable development literature often refers to the need for a reduction of consumption in the developed word. In western industrialized nations, the question of reducing consumption is raised, but research leading to policies which might effect such a reduction, is lacking. This case study examines the LMC movement in the Netherlands as an example of the practice of voluntary simplicity, or self-limitation. The group's motivation is the belief that such reductions will lead to a more just distribution of resources.

The study shows that voluntary simplicity, or self-limitation, is important for its demonstration effect, but will not necessarily lead to just and sustainable development. To make the transition from a project of self-limitation to social-limitation, material instruments and policies are necessary. A spiritual dimension is shown to be conducive to the acceptance of such instruments and policies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This thesis was researched and written during the most painful time of my life, when my personal world was turned upside down. I am blessed with many loving people, who surrounded me and held me up during this time: my children, Jennifer and Justin - your love makes it all worthwhile; Jenn, especially my thanks for your help as my 'red pen' proofreader; my friends, Robina, Bill, Carl, Jenny, Margaret, tante Riet, Els, Susan and Pat - thank you for being there; and last but not least: Peter - thank you for helping me realize that I actually can do this, and for your encouragement and support, now and always.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

> *Like the rich man through the eye of the needle, ecological revolutions must pass through each individual's rethinking and changing of even the smallest actions.... the millipede revolution of a million small steps.*
>
> Ulrich Beck, 1995:12

> *Everywhere we hear it said, all day long - and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength - that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neo-liberal view, that it has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative.*
>
> Pierre Bourdieu, 1998:29

It is an old question. The question of 'the good life' and 'the good society' and what this means. What are humanity's goals at the end of the twentieth century, and do we still have a vision of the good society? Or do we live in a society, as some would postulate, that has no vision of alternatives for the future, a "society that is without power for its own renewal," as Richard Shaull (1966:473) described it? In common modern parlance this condition is better known as TINA: there is no alternative. Kothari (1993) posits that "the most unsettling discontinuity in the modern era" is that we may have already entered "a period in which there is going to be little scope for alternatives" (p. 1100). But alternatives must always be in relation *to* something. What is it that needs alternatives formulated to it?

Alternative visions of society are placed within the context of an increasingly globalized world system. There are many descriptions of this system, but I will use the designation of 'neo-liberal capitalism' for this phenomenon. Neo-liberal capitalism is a system based on economic values of competition and efficiency, which operates in the framework of a 'free market' and the unrestricted flow of goods, services and capital, within and across nations. Neo-liberal capitalism further embraces the concepts of unlimited economic growth and technocratic rationalization. In order to create favorable conditions for competition and efficiency, markets must be deregulated and the role of the nation-state must be reduced. This system is marked by conditions of mass consumption - although it must be noted that "mass" in this context only applies to selected masses living in the industrialized western world and pockets of the rich in the developing world. It is also marked by the externalization of costs: costs to the environment, non-renewable resources and social costs. The less desirable consequences of neo-liberal growth policies, such as ecological deterioration and increasing inequalities between and within nations, often are the subjects of critiques of neoliberalism.

How did neoliberalism become the leading paradigm for our times and how did issues of ecological destruction, hunger, poverty and inequality become subjected to economic considerations? Bourdieu (1998) argues that the presuppositions of economics have become the taken-for-granted reality and are imposed as self-evident: "it is taken for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions" (p. 30,31). As such, "a radical separation is made between the economic and the social, which is left to one side, abandoned to sociologists, as a kind of reject" (p. 31). If sociologists are to pick up this reject and claim it as their own again, they must engage with de-coding the dominant discourse of neoliberalism and the free market and examine the alternatives.

The concept of sustainable development, I believe, contains aspects of an alternative vision of society. A short definition of sustainable development, used in more than one-hundred and eighty countries around the world is: ecologically sound, and economically and socially just development. This alternative vision has the potential to address both the issues of ecological deterioration and distributive social justice questions. Many definitions of sustainable development are based on a growth model. This form of sustainable development can be seen as a form of ecological modernization, meaning continuous economic growth, but in a more environmentally benign manner. Other writers on sustainable development argue the impossibility of continued exponential growth, and especially the spread of western-style mass consumption, to all of the populations of the earth, especially if we take the needs of the developing countries into account (for example, see Daly, 1990). If we take the second approach to sustainable development, the question then becomes how the limits of resources must be approached and how these resources can be distributed more equitably. Following this approach, many advocates of sustainable development maintain that levels of consumption in the industrialized, western nations must be reduced. But the motivations that would encourage people in the western world to accept reductions are either absent or only vaguely developed. The question of who or what would be the most appropriate agent for effecting such a change also is left to hang in the smog.

There is a tendency, under the neo-liberal paradigm, to shift responsibility to the individual, which "acts not only to abstract and simplify (the) problems, but also to obscure power differences among people, leaving unexamined the issues of who benefits more...and whose actions have the potential to make a meaningful impact" (Wall, 1999:18). Do individuals have the option to make meaningful choices, when organization and structures remain unchanged? Although lifestyle choices may exert some power, not all forms of power have equal significance. Kauffman (1990), in a critique of identity politics, raises the question: "What are the relations between institutional structures and structures of thought and behaviour?" (p. 77). Is the answer found in individual transformation, or in political and structural transformation, or must there be a synthesis of the two? If so, which one comes first?

Thoughtful and concerned citizens in some areas of the world voluntarily engage in reduction of consumption. What motivates these citizens to act in this manner? Could a voluntary approach of self-limitation possibly be a way in which a reduction of consumption may be achieved and a way to a more just and sustainable society? These are the questions that led me to a group of citizens in the Netherlands, engaged in such a simple lifestyle, who have also responded to questions of social justice: the Landelijk Missionair Collectief (National Missionary Collective), or LMC. The LMC is a social movement, organized in the Netherlands in 1986. It has about eight hundred adherents and is a collective in the sense of being a group of individuals with a common belief system. Their common belief system offers an interpretation of Judeo-Christian teachings, which promotes a strong sense of personal responsibility, and solidarity with all of humankind, other species, and future generations.

The LMC uses the concept 'cultural disobedience'-- a term coined by Dr. A.W. Kist, initiator and leader of the LMC. Cultural disobedience is defined as: resisting those trends in the culture that increase human suffering. It describes the pragmatic actions taken as a means of resistance and protest. Disobedience to the prevailing culture, cultural disobedience, makes the statement that the current organization of human social systems, the way we do things, has lost its legitimacy. This belief results, in practice, in an attitude of simplicity and sober[1] living and in various socio-political actions. For the adherents of the LMC, simplicity and sober living, in contrast to Calvinism and Puritanism, is not a goal or a virtue in and of itself. Rather it is a means to the end of radical social change, an alternative society.

## The research problem

> *The key question is: How can a policy of ecological self-limitation...gain power and enforceability?* *(Beck, 1995:2)*

Beck's question indeed should be one of the key questions in discussions about moving towards just and sustainable development. It is raised by many (e.g. Sachs et. al., 1998; Sanders, 1998; Taylor, 1997; Mies, 1997; Duchrow, 1995; Winsemius, 1995; Redclift and Benton, 1994; Elgin, 1993; Gomes et.al., 1992; Ekins, 1991; Durning, 1991), but answered only partially by few, or not answered at all. Moreover, if ecological self-limitation is to become a 'policy', as Beck states, is individual agency the answer? Is a voluntary approach a prelude to social transformation, is it an inherently political act, or both? Or is it an individual act without wider social implications?

Some, such as Murray Bookchin, Karl Hess, Ivan Illich and E.F. Schumacher, argue for a "soft path" towards making the transition to a just and sustainable society. The "soft path" advocates consider the question of agency an educational challenge, and argue the need for the awakening of a renewed moral consciousness. Others, such as Andre Gorz, Hazel Henderson and Amory Lovins, argue for the "hard path" of bureaucratic coercion, material incentives and scientific persuasion. In this scenario, the state is considered to be an acceptable and necessary agent to instigate change (discussed in Luke, 1987). All of these contemporary social ecologists offer an alternative view of economics, politics and society.

---

[1] 'Sober' is used here as meaning: temperate, restrained and moderate.

The issues of limits to consumption, ecological destruction, hunger, poverty and inequality may be addressed within the framework of sustainable development. If we accept that a condition for sustainable development concerns the need for a lowering of consumption and decrease of waste and pollution in the industrialized nations, this condition for sustainability must be informed by cultural and social circumstances conducive to its practice and implementation. Examination of one example of a voluntary approach to lowered consumption and a less polluting and wasteful lifestyle should help illustrate some of the social and cultural elements necessary to realize this condition for sustainability. It should also shed light on the question of agency. If a voluntary lifestyle approach, or self-limitation, is not likely to be the result of widespread motivation for large numbers of people, then how will limitation of consumption become a social project?

The concept of sustainable development is most often used in a narrow sense, concerned with ecological sustainability. In this sense it is relatively easy to communicate and operationalize. Ecological sustainability however is only one criterion, which always needs to be weighed against, and involves trade-offs, with other criteria. The cultural and social dimensions of sustainability are still under-theorized and concern acceptable life-circumstances for people now and in the future. "The concept of sustainable development therefore talks about the aspiration for a desirable or good society" (Hogenhuis, 1997:viii). The LMC challenges the prevailing cultural paradigm of advanced capitalism and neoliberalism as not desirable and not sustainable. Cultural disobedience is examined therefore as an expression of the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability. It is set within the framework of challenges to the prevailing paradigm, and as an alternative vision of a 'desirable and good society'.

The religious dimension of this particular challenge is an important component of the movement examined in this study, and must not be neglected in this analysis. Mobilization of socio-political movements relies on a network from which participants may be recruited. Religious institutions and organizations offer such a network and also a set of cultural resources, drawn from the cultural and historical contexts in which the LMC operates. How does a movement use, transform and apply such resources? And how does the context inform and influence the content of its message and its external strategies? Religion further offers a transcendental set of meanings, symbols and authority. This further raises the question whether religious groups, institutions and movements in modern, pluralistic societies, still have a role to play in identifying visions of how things might or ought to be.

## Methodology

This study is an attempt to contribute to an understanding of the conditions necessary for sustainable and socially just development to occur. Given that sustainable and socially just development will require a reduction of consumption in the industrialized nations, and will require a mechanism for the more just allocation of resources, I searched for a movement that addressed both these questions. The LMC in the Netherlands is such a movement. My background as a native of the Netherlands, my ability to speak, understand and read Dutch, and my continuing contacts within the country, made the option to do fieldwork in the Netherlands both possible and exciting. It further gave me the opportunity to examine thinking and writing on sustainable development questions in a different context. Having grown up in the Netherlands gave me a prior understanding of the culture and common-sense understandings of the subjects. Having lived in Canada for the last twenty-seven years gave me sufficient distance and the experience of another culture to make more detached observations. Yet, as a former Reformed Calvinist myself, I intuitively recognized many of the ways of thinking and acting of the group. This allowed me to get beneath the surface of everyday understandings. In this sense, the researcher is included in the research process, rather than outside of it.

The method used to conduct this study is the exploratory, qualitative case-study. The three tenets of the qualitative method are describing, understanding, and explaining. This method is appropriate to the examination of the content of a movement's beliefs and actions engaged in as a result of those beliefs.

It is this focus on content that caused me to relegate to the sidelines an earlier focus on new social movement theories as a conceptual framework for the understanding of the movement. These theories are useful to explain the 'how' of a movement's organization and actions, but lack sufficient explanatory power for the 'why' questions, nor did this framework allow me to deal in-depth with the content of the LMC's beliefs.

A preliminary examination of some of the documents of the LMC, mailed to me prior to leaving to do the fieldwork, suggested that the movement's content focus was on issues of social justice and environment, viewed from a Judeo-Christian perspective. A further emphasis I found in this preliminary documentation was on the voluntary lifestyle changes made by members, leading to a restrained and simple lifestyle.

Although the importance of a case-study is an attempt to understand the group studied, the ultimate goal is to find relevance beyond the immediate context of the study. This dual purpose leads to a tension and interplay between the examination of a particular case, and at the same time attempting to examine the broader picture. Where the empirical research was local and specific, the use of theory and existing literature allowed me to explore the broader and more complex issues raised during my study. In this sense, the description, understanding and explaining work done in this study is theoretically infused.

The themes raised in the preliminary examination of documents and the insights gained from an examination of theoretical literature, structured the research agenda to focus on questions about voluntary simplicity and the role of religion. In order to examine these questions I turned to the orienting concepts of voluntary simplicity and sustainable development. The conceptual tool of "cultural resources" used by Williams (1995) allowed me to examine the movement's ideology and use of rhetorical frames, and the contexts and meanings that shape the orientation of the actors.

The subject of this exploratory, qualitative case-study is the Landelijk Missionair Collectief (National Missionary Collective), or the LMC, and its adherents. Personal, in-depth interviews, lasting from 1.5 to 3.5 hours were held with sixteen of the adherents and the leadership of the group. A further fifteen people responded to a questionnaire, mailed to twenty-eight persons randomly chosen from the LMC mailing list. In order to present a balanced view of the movement, two interviews were held with former adherents of the movement.

The in-depth interviews and questionnaires form the core of the research. A list of open-ended questions (Appendix I) formed the basis and guideline of the interviews. This same open-ended list of questions constituted the mail-out questionnaire. All personal interviews were taped and later transcribed completely in Dutch. The analysis consisted of the organization of answers by question and a comparison on the basis of agreements or differences in the answers, and the search for and collation of particular themes. Following that I summarized parts of text, selected citations and identified theoretically interesting passages. These parts of text, citations, and passages were then translated into English by the researcher. The synopses serve as the basis for the main lines of the argument, the citations serve to illustrate these main lines, and the theoretically interesting passages serve to connect theory and empirical results.

Interviews with representatives of organizations other than the LMC offered comparative material and an interpretation of the LMC. The other organizations were chosen on the basis of similarities in goals and subject matter, such as 'Milieudefensie' the Dutch branch of 'Friends of the Earth', an environmental organization; Kairos

Europe, a European organization concerned with the consequences of neo-liberal capitalism; and the NCDO (National Committee for Sustainable Development). Two additional organizations were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide background information on the LMC, and the ability to offer an interpretation of the activities of the LMC. These were: 'Kerk en Wereld' (Church and World), an organization involved in educational activities for religious organizations; and 'Kerk en Milieu' (Church and Environment), involved with environmental questions. Both organizations have tie-ins with, or are a section of, the Dutch Council of Churches.

The in-depth interviews and mail questionnaires were not the only source of information. The researcher attended two meetings of the steering committee of the LMC as an observer. Study and analysis of documents and publications of the LMC formed another basis for the study. These documents (booklets, brochures, pamphlets, letters, reports and essays) are listed in Appendix II and are referred to in the thesis by the identification given them in Appendix II.

The use of the qualitative method means that it is only at the end of the experience that we begin to see the whole constructed. This also means that some a priori foci must be discarded, or changed. As I proceeded with the study and the collection of data, I decided that the earlier conceptual tool of  examining the content of the beliefs of the LMC as a form of "prophecy", was inappropriate and would not contribute very much to the overall discussion. I therefore included this only as a minor theme in the discussion of the religious context.

The concept of the 'signal value' of events - the broad set of reasons why societies and groups of people pay attention to certain issues and not to others - similarly fell outside of the boundaries of the examination of this particular movement. I have therefore limited my inquiry into incentives for action to the motivations of the members of the LMC.

Contrarily, the concept of 'alternative visions of the future' presented itself as an important underlying theme. My analysis and interpretation of the LMC led me to consider their beliefs and actions as an alternative vision of the future and to examine the conditions necessary for societies to move in such an alternative direction.

*Scope of the study:*

The group studied, the LMC, is a small group: it has about 800 members. As such, it provides an example, which may not necessarily be generalized to the larger population, or to different contexts. The study is also necessarily incomplete: not all members could be interviewed and the overwhelming volume of documentation precluded the examination of all documents. A selection therefore had to be made by the researcher. Sometimes this meant tracking down documentation about a particular subject, sometimes it meant selecting those documents which 'looked interesting'. A further difficulty was connected to the nature of a volunteer movement. Many documents were at the homes of steering group members, or at the home of the previous secretary of the movement. I did not have free access to all of these documents. I did have free access to the documentation stored in the LMC's office. In general, an effort was made to include an extensive sampling of documents. For example: of the seventy-three issues to date of the LMC's publication 'The Bulletin', I selected (from the available issues) every eighth issue, beginning with issue number 00. I included the first issue to examine the origins and initial focus of the movement. I also included the last four issues, to more closely examine the current activities and concerns of the movement.

Interviews were open-ended and provided ample opportunity for those interviewed to tell their stories. The interviews were guided by the questions contained in Appendix I, based on themes raised in the preliminary examination of documents and insights gained from theoretical literature. In this sense, the scope of the inquiry was not primarily determined by the informants. The interviewer attempted to avoid imposing a pre-conceived theoretical framework of meanings and definitions on the informants by limiting information given about the study to the explanation of a general inquiry into the movement's beliefs and actions.

A case study necessarily leads to an interpretive analysis of the material collected. The choice of evidence is left to the researcher. This subjective approach may lead to an analysis which chooses evidence to suit the researcher's interests and supports the researcher's theoretical focus. Potential investigator subjectivity is counteracted, where possible, by using multiple sources of evidence, and by the establishment of a chain of evidence. The interpretive account is grounded in the language of the people studied and relies as much as possible on their own words and concepts. Despite the effort to report the views of respondents as they were related to me, the danger of sliding into a superficial and particularistic account necessitates analysis and interpretation of the data. The evidence collected is not simply reported, but rather is viewed through a lens with an a priori focus, resulting in a construction by the researcher, as much as a straight-forward account.

## Structure of the thesis

A case study requires a fine balance between narrative description and analysis. An oscillation takes place between micro and macro analysis, narrowing and expanding the focus. The analysis thus moves backwards and forwards between specific observation and the consideration of broader issues. The thesis becomes a synthesis of observation and review of academic literature, a mixture of observation and theoretical work. The thesis is structured, therefore, as follows:

The first chapter contains an introduction and statement of the research problem. It also places the study within a larger body of theoretical work. The second part of this chapter describes the methodology and the restrictions of the study. Chapter two introduces the concepts used in guiding this study and in the analysis of the movement. It concludes with an overview of the Dutch context, and features of Dutch society which possibly have an impact on the way the movement understands society and the form of actions open to it.

Chapter three is the first of a section of three chapters, which contain a narrative description of the case. Analysis of the data, along with selected quotes and passages from literature are inserted throughout the narrative to support the description. Chapter three focuses specifically on the origins and ideology of the LMC. Chapter four describes the activities undertaken by the movement, collectively and by its individual members.

Chapter five specifically looks at the religious dimension of the movement, and places it within a wider context.

Chapter six focuses more closely on the idea of voluntary simplicity and provides examples of similar movements. Chapter seven concludes the study, providing a summary of findings, description of major themes and recommendations for further research.

The data are presented with an eye to a narrative logic and thematic presentation. Details are arranged to best present the particulars of the story.

# CHAPTER 2

## Introduction to concepts and literature review

It is always easier on the way up, than on the way down. Consumption has grown dramatically during the decades since World War II, for most people in the western industrialized world. To halt or reverse this increase, with its accompanying environmental deterioration and increasing inequalities, is easier said than done. For most people, conspicuous consumption always begins with those in the next, higher wage-bracket.

A study, commissioned by Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth) in the Netherlands (1999), concluded that the majority of those questioned agreed that western individuals consume too much. They agreed that as a result the resources of the earth become depleted. And they also agreed that they, themselves, did *not* consume too much. Given these results, where then will reasons and motivations for change come from and on what basis? Could it be that consumption is at the *basis* of the current neo-liberal capitalist system, and is that why consumption is the hardest aspect of our culture to change? If so, changes in consumption habits and levels must necessarily be tied to alternative bases of the social, cultural, political and economic system. The concept of sustainable development allows an examination of such possible alternative bases, and an examination of the question of consumption in industrialized nations.

### *Sustainable development*

In literature dealing with ideas about the future, the idea of sustainable development is second only to the idea of the information society (Olson, 1995).

Sustainable development as a concept has come to the forefront since, in 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, issued its report *Our Common Future* and defined the concept as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (WCED, 1987:43). The concept has since become a catch phrase, widely used to describe greatly differing goals and ways of achieving these goals. "As an ideal it is nowadays as persistent a political concept as are democracy, justice and liberty" (O'Riordan, 1993:65). Despite, and quite likely because of, its vagueness and ambiguity, it has become an 'ideal', a 'guiding principle', an 'overarching concept'. It is a pleasant proposition, similar to shorter winters and longer summers. Everyone is in favour of it, but "opinion differs considerably as to what the concept should imply in practice" (CPB, 1996:6).

In the last number of years, attention has shifted from conceptualization and attempts at definition of the concept of sustainable development, to attempts to operationalize the concept. Most of these attempts at operationalization have come within a narrow ecological and technological framework. In this sense sustainability involves the basic conditions for the continuation of modern society, or ecological modernization. Sustainability can also be a concept to resist modern society, in extreme cases a plea for a return to a pre-modern society. In this case the concept of sustainable development fundamentally resists the ideology of continued exponential economic growth (Hogenhuis, 1997).

One of the main points of contention is whether or not sustainable development can be accomplished with economic growth, or whether economic growth needs to be stabilized, reduced, or redirected. The most common approach: sustainability is a relatively "hard, quantitative, ecological condition, which places limits on desires and activities of people" (Hogenhuis, 1997:54). Notable is that often a contradiction is assumed between environment/nature and economic growth: nature places limits on economic activity. Because economic growth is identified with prosperity, a resistance to sustainability requirements develops. The contradiction, however, can be overcome with the help of science and technology and the right policy instruments. In this technological deterministic sense, sustainability becomes a technological and economic problem, a matter to be left to experts to resolve (Redclift and Benton, 1994). The problem much less talked about, is that the volume of consumption growth will in turn negate efficiency gains and technological innovation, unless it also involves a redirection of the financial space created by such gains and innovation. Social, cultural and institutional conditions for sustainable development do not get much attention in this scenario. The question remains whether the discussion can be limited to ecological aspects of sustainability only, even if one limits the questions to those of an ecological nature (Hafkamp, 1998; Hogenhuis, 1997).

The scientific, technological view of solutions to sustainability often leads to an optimistic evaluation. One of the main advocates of the optimistic view of environmental questions is Julian Simon (1982). He argues that, even should there be a limit to the earth's natural resources (which is not proven), there are sufficient resources on other planets to keep the population of the earth supplied forever. Many see eco-efficiency,

efficiency in the use of energy and materials, as the solution (Wallerstein, 1998a; von Weizsacker, 1997; Strong, 1995). The more pessimistic do not agree. They look at the long-term consequences of phenomena currently only partially visible and indirectly perceived. They point at the risks involved in continuing blindly into an unknown future. Beck (1995) points to the "social and deep structure of ecological questions", because conflicts result from "the violation of survival norms" (p.9). The emergence of social and political movements that "seek to curtail environmental degradation is one of the most significant developments" in this respect (Goldblatt, 1996:1; see also Taylor, 1997; Buechler, 1995).

Sustainable development not linked to the issues of what type of economic growth is desirable, how economic growth is distributed and even whether continued growth is desirable, leads to a one-sided view. "The win-win situation often advocated is possible when we look at western industrial societies only. If we take into account the requirements for developing countries to grow and claim their fair share of resources and well-being, the win-win situation is not so easily realized" (Hogenhuis, 1997:56). Normative choices then become a condition which must be linked to issues of social justice.

If we consider sustainable development as an alternative vision of society, then the social and cultural conditions for moving towards sustainable development must be in place. This may also be seen as preconditions for alternative societies. What are these conditions?

## *Preconditions for alternative societies*

In order to develop alternative ways of organizing ourselves, a number of preconditions must exist. First, there must be a language to express the desired outcomes; second, the desired outcomes must be seen to be *better* than what exists; third, the alternatives must be seen to be plausible and for that reason ways of thinking and examples of lived alternatives must be available; and finally, socially available knowledge must be redirected and de-coded.

The first condition for the possibility of alternative social systems, must be found in examining current language use and identifying the ways in which alternative values and ideals are expressed or understood. Seabrook (1993) takes a position similar to mine, when he says that new language becomes necessary when values and ideals of a society have ceased to be congruent with the language of the dominant social order. Although western societies' rhetoric holds up the values of democracy and freedom as the most cherished ideals, these perceived values have ceased to reflect reality. Democracy is subordinated to vested interests in the forms of international corporations, international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, the wealthy and science and technology. In the words of Seabrook (1993), democracy has become "the superintendence of organized impotence" (p. 5). Freedom is not the freedom of *real* choice, but only the diminished freedom to choose from a cornucopia of consumer items, considered to be marketable and profitable. Freedom to choose other, perhaps less destructive ways to meet human needs, are not available, constricting 'freedom' to that which is prescribed by the elusive 'market'. Neither does this 'freedom' guarantee us freedom from bodily harm, due to environmental threats. So too, the rhetoric of neo-liberal capitalism operates within the narrow language of economics and free market ideology. The universalizing mission of the West "we once imposed upon much of the rest of the world through military conquest, we now filter through the more elegant and subtle conduits of economic necessity" (Seabrook, 1993:5). The words still weigh us down, but a new language is forming all around us.

Second, the proposed outcomes must be seen to be desirable. "One constraint under which any politics operates is the requirement that the economic and political alternatives it offers have some plausibility and attractiveness" (Goldblatt, 1996:13). A member of the Labour party in the Netherlands put it this way: "I can not do much in political circles with the idea of sober living, but the concept of a qualitatively better life is interesting to take to the polls" (Leemreize, in van Driel, 1994:173). It helps, of course, if the prevailing paradigm begins to lose some of its shine. The neo-liberal growth model "looked all shiny and invincible until recently. First, the much-lauded Asian economies plunged into a crisis. Then, there was the Russian meltdown, followed by the Brazilian swoon" (Ekachai and Achakulwisut, 1999). These instances, global environmental problems and the continued destitution of the majority of the world's population, show the cracks of structural and ideological limits to the neo-liberal model. As these cracks affect more and more people, perhaps social hope can be reborn. Perhaps Gorz is right when he says that a few limited disasters may be sufficient to speed up the process (1993:67), but I would prefer to believe Jeremy Seabrook: "Social hope can be reborn only when a coherent and satisfying alternative becomes visible through the embalming fluid in which the received pieties are preserved" (1993:3).

Third, a coherent *and* satisfying alternative must become visible, or as Seabrook (1993:3) phrases it: "the outline of an alternative must be discernible through the decaying structures". One of the most striking phenomenon of the late twentieth century is the emergence of NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations). Many NGO's exist in opposition to neo-liberal capitalism and concern themselves with issues such as human rights, the environment, social justice and peace, all issues which market ideology places outside the realm of the calculable. Smaller groups in many countries also attempt to make visible and live an alternative worldview. As Klaus Eder points out: new social movements provide an alternative cultural model and moral order (Buechler, 1995:448). As such they are carriers of a critique of the modern project. The work of change, before change actually occurs, is often long, arduous and discouraging. However, it is necessary, even if no immediate results are visible, if only to nurture the creative and spiritual elements of the human spirit. Whether the catalyst for eventual change will be disastrous, or a more benign, slow shift - alternatives must be available. Alternatives further "stretch the playing-field" (Tielemans in van Driel, 1994:131) on which policies are formulated and implemented. Stretching of the playing-field is accomplished by cultural processes, discussion, debate, stigmatization-processes and social control, which take place in the social middle, not in government circles. Social control is not a negative in this instance: it obtains a positive loading if the alternative is seen as a better quality of life. We must therefore see the role of alternatives - lived and debated - as not immediately measurable, but rather as preliminary processes to future change. What is now peripheral may become part of the mainstream sooner than we think.

Finally, socially available knowledge must be redirected and de-coded. As Beck (1995) says: "Seeing is cultural seeing, attention is narrated attention" (p. 14).

> What people see or do not see is not determined by their visual acuity, nor does it depend on their attentiveness, it is essentially codetermined by what they know or do not know. Knowledge unblocks the view. Someone who knows more and different things also sees more, sees differently and sees different things...The blindness of everyday life with respect to the omnipresent, abstract, scientific threats is therefore a relative and revisable process that depends on the socially available knowledge based on one's own experience, and on whether and how much society considers it worthwhile to pay attention to these events that 'at first glance' appear to be acting in a closed space. (Beck, 1995:13)

Society at the beginning of the twenty-first century does not lack information, nor does it lack knowledge about threats to survival, or the conditions of life in places other than our own. It perhaps lacks wisdom and the will to pay attention. A contributing factor to the blocking of the type of learning necessary for alternative conceptions of society, is the narrow separation of the natural sciences and the social sciences and humanities. Science is applied in the service of a single paradigm and a single form of power: that of neoliberal capitalism. This constitutes a form of one-sided cultural seeing, for which a redirection and combination of different forms of knowledge is necessary. Purveyors of alternatives have a role to play in disseminating different forms of knowledge and information.

An alternative conception of society is contained in the idea of sustainable development: development that is ecologically sound and economically and socially just. It has been debated at many levels of societal organization, from the local to the international, and a certain language has sprung up around it. It *can be* an alternative to the neoliberal capitalist paradigm, although many vested interests use the language in order to sustain what is. But even then, it is considered *better* than continuing without any changes to the way we do things. In many areas the debate has moved on to the implementation of certain aspects of sustainability. Examples of what is possible, what works and answers to the 'how' questions are becoming available. And finally, a realization is beginning to set in that new knowledge integrations are essential to a sustainable future. With the realization that ecology is inseparable from equity, attention is slowly and reluctantly turning to questions of sufficiency and limits in the industrialized nations.

*Consumption and voluntary simplicity*

> *The North wants to resolve the crisis without a radical transformation of the thought, structures and development process...it does not understand the possibility that a certain reduction in...prosperity might increase the quality of their lives...In a strong sense the North is in a state of cultural helplessness.* Gomes et.al., 1992:41

To paraphrase Hardin (1968): It seems fair to say that most people who actually do question the sustainability of current practices are trying to find ways to avoid the evils of unsustainability without relinquishing any of the privileges they now enjoy.

The quote from Gomes et.al. (1992) at the beginning of this section, is taken from an interesting report, in which a number of writers from developing countries (Brazil, Indonesia, Tanzania and India) were invited to the Netherlands by the Dutch Alliance for Sustainable Development and the Alliance of Northern Peoples for Environment and Development (ANPED). This project asked the writers to develop a critical report on the sustainability of Dutch society. Their conclusion? "The destruction of the balance within nature was inherent in the basic frame of mind which created modern industrialization of the Western type" (p. 25).

This 'basic frame of mind', the doctrine of neo-liberal capitalism, has at its base a productive system which has the accumulation of capital as its only end. The work of Andre Gorz (1994, 1989, 1985) links the defence of nature and the defence of human autonomy with issues of a just distribution of resources. He proposes a humanist model of sustainable development, or a post-capitalist society, ultimately based on the principle of 'self-limitation'. He suggests that such self-limitation will only be possible if society begins to redefine its conceptions of prosperity and well-being. Gorz bases the foundations of such a redefinition on breaking the link between income and work. He proposes a guaranteed income and a reduction in worktime with a consequent redistribution of employment, so that free self-determined activity will create a "sphere of non-market consumption, and should people choose, production as well" (Goldblatt, 1996:109). Effectively, his strategy circumvents the market (Goldblatt, 1996; Strange, 1996; Bowring, 1995; Gorz, 1993).

Ekins (1991) argues that the "crisis of unsustainability must be laid squarely at the door of northern industrial consumer lifestyles and their imitations now in nearly all countries of the Third World[2]". Ekins then asks the question: "can this unsustainability be converted to sustainability in the context of a consumer society?" (p. 249). He posits that the answer has two parts, one economic and one human. The human part of the move towards a change to a sustainable and equitable future lies in the insight that money does not bring happiness. This insight is one of the bases often mentioned as a motivating factor leading people to choose a life of 'voluntary simplicity'.

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[2] I use terms such as 'Third World', 'developed countries', 'North', 'South', etc. as they are commonly understood. I am aware of the impreciseness of these terms and the value judgments sometimes embedded in them. Since there are no precise terms available to deal with these issues, I have chosen to use the terms most commonly used in the literature and in everyday language.

Although this study is not a comparative study and no original research was done on voluntary simplicity in North America, much of the literature on voluntary simplicity is based on the American case. For this reason, and to show that the practice of simple living is not confined to the Dutch case of the LMC, I now turn to a brief review of the voluntary simplicity phenomenon in the United States.

"Voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle of low consumption, ecological responsibility and self-sufficiency" (Shama, 1985:57). Predictions have been made for years that voluntary simplicity practitioners are an expanding segment of the population in North America and elsewhere in the western world. It must first of all, be distinguished from involuntary simplicity - poverty. Voluntary simplicity is consciously chosen. It "involves not only what we do (the outer world), but also the intention with which we do it (the inner world) (Elgin, 1993:144). The slogan "Live simply, so that others may simply live", indicates an awareness of the connection between poverty for many and abundance for some. According to Shama (1985) the number of voluntary simplicity practitioners in the United States was 15 million in 1977[3]. The number was expected to increase to 60 million by 1987 and to 120 million by the year 2000. Has this increase actually resulted?

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[3] Shi (1988) appears to disagree with this number. He refers to research by the Stanford Research Institute showing 4 to 5 million adults committed to leading a simple life by the mid 1970s. The discrepancy is probably due to the fact that Shama includes both "full" and "partial" practitioners of voluntary simplicity.

An article in the Edmonton Journal (Koenenn, 1998:C8) focused on the pressures of consumerism at Christmas time and describes the efforts of the Centre for a New American Dream, which launched a 'Simplify the Holidays Campaign'. A brochure with tips on how to avoid overspending and stress was requested by 10,000 people in the first week of publication. Other indications that the ideal is alive and well are reports that voluntary simplicity was one of the top 10 trends in 1994 (Schor, 1995) and predictions that it will be one of the "trends to help shape the new millennium" (Celente, 1998; Stark, 1997; Ottman, 1995). The Trends Institute of New York found voluntary simplicity again to be one of the top ten trends of 1997:

> The voluntary simplicity trend that originated in the United States is now spreading throughout the industrialized world. From Scotland to Australia and Finland to Canada, masses of people are beginning to embrace the belief that they can enhance the quality of their lives by cutting back on the quantity of products they consume. Never before in the Institute's 17 years of trend tracking has a societal trend grown so quickly, spread so broadly, and been embraced so eagerly. Quoted in Elgin and LeDrew, 1997:27

Elgin and LeDrew further quote a 1995 U.S. study, *Yearning for Balance*, suggesting that in the five years from 1990 to 1995 more than 50 million Americans 'downshifted' or made changes to simplify their lives. The study reports that 88 percent of respondents agreed that "protecting the environment will require most of us to make changes in the way we live". Eighty-two percent agreed that "most of us buy and consume far more than we need: it's wasteful". And ninety-one percent agreed to the statement: "we focus too much on getting what we want now and not enough on future generations". The summary of the Yearning for Balance report states, "People express a strong desire for a greater sense of balance in their lives -- not to repudiate material gain, but to bring it more into proportion with the non-material rewards of life" (Quoted in Elgin and LeDrew, 1997:28).

Historically, David Shi (1988) traced the practice of simple living in American society from the early Puritan settlers to the late 1970s. He found in all cases simplicity to be an explicit rejection of the prevailing social and economic order. For early groups such as the Puritans and the Quakers, simplicity was an instrument of social control. Often the message of simplicity was directed at the masses, while the elites preached plain living, but practiced otherwise. In the late 1700s, the rise of Republican simplicity saw a change to simplicity as an agent for social change. "For many colonial leaders, republicanism entailed a comprehensive moral vision that provided a secular analogue of the Protestant ethic" (p. 52). The ideal and practice of simplicity never disappeared from American life, but waxed and waned throughout the centuries. Simplicity was e[illegible]ked during times of national emergency: martial, economic, or cultural crisis. As such, it has "provided an emergency reservoir of moral purpose during times of crisis" (p. 278). During times of non-crisis it remains an ideal and not a way of life for the majority of citizens of the wealthy nations.

"What does it mean for everyday life to believe the problems exist and to take them seriously?" (Beck, 1995:12). Perhaps that is the main problem: the common perception that a crisis does not exist, that there is no reason to take ecological and inequality problems seriously. Why is this so? The sociological theories regarding system and lifeworld, postmaterialism, and world-systems theories may shed some light on this question.

*Lifeworld and System*

Those that do take the issues seriously and believe that there is a crisis may be found in environmental movements worldwide, in peace movements, human rights movements and in social justice movements. Generally, these types of movements are known as 'new social movements', to differentiate them from older social movements which were more concerned with material interests, such as the labour movement. How do these movements come to their beliefs in crisis and what motivates them to act? Goldblatt (1996) identifies three reasons for mobilization: one, structurally determined interests; two, cognitive understandings of the world; and three, ideal-moral values.

Structurally determined interests are probably best illustrated by Habermas' theory of the colonization of the lifeworld. Habermas proposes an analytical distinction between system (the political and economic world) and the lifeworld, which is defined as the

> ...intersubjective realm of people's everyday life. It consists of all the taken-for-granted knowledge that we create and share, such as language or values; of the actions we plan and carry out; and of the justifications for those acts. (Fields, 1991:183)

When the politico-economic system, governed by generalized media of money and power, intrudes upon and begins to "colonize" the lifeworld, a defensive action is taken by some in the form of a social movement. The "colonization of the lifeworld" refers to the "shift of the boundary between 'system' and the 'lifeworld'". Field argues that the lifeworld exists in the private, micro-sphere, and that it is a- or antipolitical and is focused on "family, work, consumption and leisure" (Fields, 1991:183).

Colonization of the lifeworld leads to a rejection of the four roles of citizens at the interface, or the seams, of system and lifeworld. Focusing on one of the roles, that of the consumer[4], leads to a rejection of the commodification of lifestyles. Problematic in Habermas' theory for the purposes of this thesis, is that first of all, the line between system and lifeworld may not be as clear as he theoretically postulates it to be. Secondly, his conception that the new middle classes are most receptive to moral argument and act on them politically, is due to system intrusion on the lifeworld. This disregards the fact that intrusion of the system on the lifeworld is most often more problematic for the lower classes, who generally are not the ones who mobilize in new social movements. The juridification of social rights, for example, has resulted in a welfare state that functions as a vehicle for colonization of the lifeworld. Since the lower classes are the ones most often dependent on the workings of the welfare state, they lack a defence against the intrusion of the system on the lifeworld (Goldblatt, 1996).

Goldblatt (1996) shows that Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism offers a more convincing argument as to why the educated middle classes are more likely to be involved in new social movements. The theory of postmaterialism shows an ideal-moral value base from which citizens might mobilise. Postmaterialism is based on a hierarchy of human needs, in which humans, after lower needs for survival and security are met, tend to place more emphasis on personal satisfaction and self-realization, the quality of life and aesthetic values. Inglehart's explanation focuses on the "distinctive cohort experience of the postwar generation:...the absence of total war and the immense increase in personal disposal income for the majority of people in the West since 1945" (p. 148,149). Economic changes during this period have diminished the size and importance of the traditional working classes and have created a highly educated new class of professional, white-collar workers.

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[4] The other three are: the employee role, the political role and the role of client and the client relationship to the public sector (Goldblatt, 1998:128).

> Education leads to a diminished concern with self and a moral and political perspective that is more universal: a perspective increasingly concerned with one's environment, one's aesthetic needs and with the needs of others. (Goldblatt, 1996: 149)

Postmaterialist values, moreover, tend to be articulated as "a broad vision of an alternative social order" (p. 150).

As stated in the introduction, alternatives must be in relation *to* something. I identified this as the system of 'neoliberal capitalism'. World systems theory places this system, which it defines as 'Americanized consumer hegemony', within a broad historical explanation of consecutive world systems[5]. The aspect of the theory I wish to emphasize here, is that the current system is in a long and difficult transition to another system or systems. Supporters of the current system may point to the virtues: "material abundance and convenience; the existence of liberal political structures; and the lengthening of the average lifespan" (Wallerstein, 1998b:65). There is no crisis here. The critics, however, those who see a crisis and the need for alternatives, point to other aspects of the current system: "acute inequality...the absence of significant popular participation in decision making...(and) the seriously degraded quality of life" (p. 66). At the basis of these crisis tendencies is the need for "the endless accumulation of capital" (p. 66) and in turn the need for ever increased production and consumption of material goods. According to Wallerstein, this system of capital accumulation has structural limitations and these limitations are beginning to act as "a brake on the functioning of the system" (p. 89).

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[5] A world system is defined as: "those rare instances when a single state dominates the system politically, economically, and culturally" (Taylor, 1997:4). It is not within the scope of this paper to go into detail regarding the historical rise and fall of world systems. For further detail see Wallerstein (1998a, 1998b) and Taylor (1997).

This cognitive understanding of the world may lead to forms of mobilization in social movements. Peter Taylor (1997) suggests that the neoliberal capitalist system invites reactions in the form of, what he terms, antisystemic challenges, "the purveyors of alternative worlds" (p.6). An antisystemic challenge is defined as "one that aspires to change the structures that underpin the modern world system" (p. 2). Taylor focuses on the rise of global environmental movements, as an antisystemic challenge to neoliberal capitalism. Environmental movements have had to incorporate issues of social justice in their programmes, as a response to concerns of Third World organizations who saw environmentalism as an anti-development project. For this reason, Taylor expects the emergence of an environmental socialism at the global level.

### *Religion*

Is it possible for such a challenge to arise out of religious concerns? Some would argue that it is not only possible, but essential: "(I)f we are to maintain any sense of coherence or meaning in our lives, we cannot tolerate the present utter disconnection between religion and economy" (Berry, 1993:99).

Religious movements will tend to draw on pre-existing codes, values, beliefs, traditions, rituals and institutions. In the case of the LMC, the pre-existing conditions are embedded in Judeo-Christian values and especially in its prophetic and justice dimensions. Williams (1995) shows that a movement's ideology may be examined as a set of "cultural resources", or symbolic tools, drawing on an existing cultural and political repertoire. "Cultural resources" may be defined as: "the symbolic tools that movements wield in their efforts at social change, be they formal ideologies or symbolic-expressive actions" (p. 127). These cultural resources are presented in a strategical rhetorical frame and will serve as part of the movement's identity, but also may be used as part of the movement's external strategy. The choice of certain cultural resources ("tools") is shaped by their availability within historically situated contexts. The symbolic tools are then adapted to articulate grievances and motivate action.

Duchrow (1995) argues that the churches must use all available tools and accept a particularly important role in formulating an alternative conception of the future. The roots of the western economic order are found in Western Christianity (primarily the United States and Europe, with Japan as the exceptional case). The (Christian) churches therefore have a "particular responsibility to face the (economic, social and political) facts" (p. 16). The churches, beyond their own refusal to face facts, are further marginalized by the current economic discourse which brands "ethical, theological or other external viewpoints...as moralizing and therefore not to be taken seriously" (p.20). (See also Goudzwaard and De Lange, 1995). Moreover, the role of religion in current social movement theories is often neglected and undertheorized (Hart, 1996). A realization is further beginning to set in, that we must return to the "collective wisdom of religions...rather than the false god of economics" (Walden Bello, in Ekachai and Achakulwisut, 1999). Robbins (1999) proposes that all religious movements arising in the past two centuries have been reactions to industrial capitalism and contained a critique of growth. Their critique is based on issues of morality. As such, religion may have more to say about the formulation of alternative ends for society.

### *Research Questions*

This thesis addresses two questions. First, in light of issues of sustainable development and social justice, is living the simple life (voluntary simplicity), as practiced by the LMC membership, a viable way to reduce consumption and to change to more sustainable patterns of existence in the developed, industrialized countries of the West? Second, what is the role of religion in identifying alternative futures and what resources does it bring to bear on achieving the posited alternatives?

In relation to these questions, it is also necessary to examine whether the case of the LMC is an isolated phenomenon, applicable to Dutch society only, or whether it contains similarities to other movements in the industrialized western world. If so, is the movement part of a wider pattern of resistance to the dominant paradigm?

## The Dutch context

The Netherlands is a part of the industrialized, western world. It is one of the rich nations, developed, in the North, or in world-systems theory terms: part of the "core". Economically, the country has posted remarkable successes in recent years: chronically high unemployment has been reduced to extremely low standards by European comparison; budget deficits have been reduced; and inflation remains low. The current Dutch economic and political model, the *poldermodel*[6], is cited as "a success story" by

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[6] A 'polder' is a low-lying piece of land, reclaimed from the sea or a river. Much of the Netherlands is divided in 'polders', which form the basis of the water management systems.

Bill Clinton; "Dutch delight" by *The Economist;* or "the third way" by the *New York Times* (Bolkestein, 1999).

Yet, in the midst of this admiration by others and self-congratulation stands the LMC with its message that things have to be different. The LMC argues that the current economic 'successes' are based on a plunder of the environment and of the life-chances of the poorest in the world. The current success will turn against humanity in the long-term and already is problematic, in the Netherlands and elsewhere both in terms of environmental problems and growing inequality.

As I have shown in the introduction and in the literature review, the position of the LMC is neither unique or new, nor confined to problems in Dutch society. The concerns of the LMC with ecological risks and continued poverty and suffering for a large number of the world's populations, are addressed and acknowledged by many groups around the world. These problems are a recurring subject of discussion and efforts at change in different times and in different places.

The following discussion of the Dutch context attempts to illuminate a number of questions about the particular features of Dutch society that contribute to the ways in which the LMC expresses its concerns; the factors that contribute to its views of social conditions and social change; the religious aspects of their beliefs; and the difficulty in the contemporary Netherlands of identifying a constituency for the movement.

## *Historical, political, economic and social aspects of Dutch society*

The following brief description of some of the historical and political developments in the Netherlands, attempts to identify certain keys to the country as it exists today. In the Dutch political climate and system of organization, how are the interests of certain groups, especially those with alternative views, expressed? What avenues are open to them to influence and participate in the decision-making process?

The Netherlands is marked by a culture of participation. The poldermodel is essentially a consensus model, marked by widespread consultation with different interest groups. The Netherlands is characterized by the open and tolerant attitude of its citizens and government. The constitution of 1848 guaranteed freedom of organization, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. People organized their education, labour unions and trade associations within their own 'pillars', or interest groups. Thus the different interests were represented and channeled into an organized and orderly participation in the decision- making process. This culture of participation leads to an expectation that every citizen will have a say in the affairs of the country.

Politically, the Netherlands first united a number of cities in different alliances, later it united a number of provinces, and in 1848 a new constitution formed what is now known as the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The constitution stipulated the separation of church and state, and gave clear, but limited powers to the state. The character of society was liberal, open, and allowed a broad participation by the middle layers of society. In 1917 the right to vote was extended to all males, and the system changed from representation by district, to proportional representation. The right to vote was extended to include females in 1919. Dutch society also continued to organize itself into groups and political parties representing the interests of different components of the population. This process, known as pillarization, lead to a division of society into four main groups: Protestants, Catholics, socialists and liberals, the so-called 'pillars'.

Since the introduction of proportional representation in 1917, the country's governments were coalitions, mostly of Protestant and Catholic parties. After the second world war, the socialist labour party participated for the first time in government. Since that time coalitions have consisted of the 'confessional' (religion-based) parties, the liberals and occasionally the socialist labour party. In 1994 and again in 1998, the socialist labour party and the liberals formed a coalition government, excluding the confessional parties for the first time since 1917 (van der Ham: 1998).

Traditionally, then, participation was guided by the traditional interest groups, the 'pillars'. Religious interests and concerns were represented by the Protestant or Catholic political parties. The decades since the 1960s saw increasing de-pillarization, individualization and secularization in the Netherlands. Voting patterns are increasingly determined by interests other than one's traditional roots: a shift away from traditional, religious, value-based politics. Collective interests now are secondary to individual interests, leading to a search for new forms of participation. Individual possibilities to exert influence are experienced as fragmented (NCDO, 1998:13). Interest groups thus find it increasingly difficult to call on a homogeneous base and are faced with constantly shifting connections between individuals, making it difficult to identify a constituency for social movements.

The economy in the Netherlands grew by more than three percent annually since 1995, unemployment is now less than five percent[7], compared to double digit employment in the eighties and early nineties. The unemployment figure of less than 5% is disputed by some, who argue that the number does not include those incapable of working and the involuntarily pensioned-off. The non-participating, excluded segment of the population is estimated at 20 to 25% when these categories are included (e.g. Van Dieren, 1998, Bolkestein, 1998). Furthermore, one-third of workers are part-time, or 'flexworkers' as the Dutch describe them, the highest proportion of part-time workers in the industrialized world (Bolkestein, 1998).

At the basis of this economic success story lies a pact between government, labour unions and employers to keep wages in check, emphasize education, employment and investment and a program of deregulation and revision of social security laws (WRR, 1998). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) "democratic corporatism is at least as effective as liberal free-market economies and open, global-directed economies" (Walker, 1999:19). Europe looks at the Dutch 'poldermodel' as an example of a new social contract. The ILO notes that the Dutch success formula for low unemployment lies in four factors: one, a corporatistic approach; two, social dialogue; three, stable prices and interest rates; and four, active labour market policies. In addition, tax cuts helped make a program of wage moderation possible and a fierce pruning of generous social security benefits contributed to the reduction of the budget deficit. This has also contributed to a decline of 21.3% in the purchasing power of those on the minimum wage (Bolkestein, 1998). The LMC pressed for an increase in minimum incomes to ameliorate these reductions. The group also was represented in a consultation on 'The Poor Side of the Netherlands' and pointed to growing inequality in the traditionally egalitarian Netherlands. A successful economy, serving the immediate interests of a large middle group of citizens, tends to be not very receptive to cries of problems in a distant time, or a distant place, or even, close to home.

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[7] The European average is 10%.

### *Geography*

The geographical features and location of the Netherlands formed cultural characteristics that illuminate the Dutch perception of nature and the environment. The country is small, 41,526 square kilometers, which includes 7,637 square kilometers of inland water area. It is located at the North-Western edge of Europe, with the North Sea delimiting its western and northern borders, Germany to the east and Belgium to the south. The country is largely a delta comprised of silt from the mouths of the Rhine and four other major rivers. Land was and is continuously reclaimed by a system of draining the delta and managing water flows. A popular saying is that, "God created the earth, but the Dutch made the Netherlands". The inland area, which in some places is below sea level, is protected by coastal dunes and manmade dikes. Without these sea defenses, approximately forty percent of the country would be under water. The smallness of the country, and its access to the North Sea and the world's oceans beyond, gave the Dutch an external orientation.

A history of struggle against the water entering the country from upstream, and always threatening to enter the country from the sea, gives the Dutch a long history of experience with a major environmental issue. It gives the population a great deal of confidence that nature can be mastered, as they have done with their system of water management. The Netherlands has had a system of water management boards since about 1200 C.E. Moreover, it meant a collective orientation. "When the dikes break, all Dutch act" (Winsemius, 1995:76). And action in this case must be collective action. The single little boy stemming the floods by keeping a finger in the hole in the dike exists only in a children's story. Action is pragmatic: when the dikes break one does not call a meeting, one starts sandbagging.

### *Religion in the Netherlands*

The LMC's ideology is based in the Judeo-Christian belief system, and especially its Calvinist strain. Is religion still a part of the cognitive framework of the country and if not, then what is the place of religious interests and how are they expressed? A member of the LMC summarizes the change from traditional politics based on one's religious and traditional roots, to goal-oriented politics:

> Now, the question is more about what you want to accomplish, rather than where your roots are. If you want to accomplish the same thing, then you work together.
>
> Nel Baart I-7

"The Dutch socio-political domain consisted of a coalition of many independent religious and ideological groups" (Janssen, 1998:113). This system of interest groups (the 'pillars'), channeled the expression of interests throughout recent Dutch history. The 1994 election of the first government since the beginning of the century without representation of the religious parties, seems to signal the end of the strength of the confessional parties.

Secularization[8] took place swiftly and strongly in the Netherlands. Since independence the country was a multi-religious society, with a Calvinist orientation as "a structuring element of national identity" (Janssen: 1998:116), even among non-believers. Today the population shows less religious affiliation. There is a steady decline of religious organizations, opinions and behaviours, and the lowest percentage of church members in Western Europe. Table 1 shows the decline in professed membership since 1945, projected to the year 2000.

**Table 1**

| | 1945 | By 2000 |
|---|---|---|
| Catholic | 40% | 20% |
| Protestants | Over 40% | Less than 15% |
| Non-Church | 15% | 62% |

(Janssen, 1998)

Secularization was an important component of de-pillarization, the breaking down of the system of groups based on traditional interests. Mady A. Thung (1994) identifies other factors contributing to the breaching of the pillarized, isolated Dutch population, such as in-country migration, urbanization, the introduction of television and higher levels of education. With the demolition of the pillars, especially the religious ones, the question of the construction of a new society and obtaining normative consensus looms large. If peoples' interests are not channeled through their historical interest groups, then how are they expressed?

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[8] Secularization, defined by Dobbelaere, quoted in Janssen (1998) as: "the steady decline of the importance of religion

De-pillarization brought a proliferation in the formulation of political demands. "Old and new interest groups expressed their specific demands...without the bundling, selection and channeling that took place within the pillars" (Thung, 1994:93).

The 1960s, a period of societal unrest in the Netherlands and in other countries, brought into existence action groups which articulated specific interests, not necessarily tied to the interests of the historical pillars. "The social cohesion of the pillarized, religious communities made place for a 'market' of interest groups" (Thung, 1994: 221).

A growing awareness of increasing environmental pollution and increasing traffic and transportation problems also led to protest as early as the 1960s (De Lange, 1994). The publication, in 1972, of the *Limits to Growth* report of the Club of Rome attracted a great deal of attention and generated intense discussion in the Netherlands. Concern rose with the oilcrises of the 1970s and focused on questions of energy supply and security. People took to the streets in protest. The most important and massive were the peace protests against nuclear weapons and nuclear energy in 1983 and 1985. Interest in environmental questions decreased during the period 1979 - 1983, when an economic recession hit the country. It increased again in the late 1980s with the publication of the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*. Dutch Queen Beatrix's 1988 Christmas speech focused interest further on environmental issues: "What we are witnessing is not the sudden destruction of the earth, but a silent drama...The earth is dying slowly and the

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in societal affairs, the daily lives of the people and of religion as such" (p. 110).

unimaginable - the end of life itself - becomes imaginable" (Quoted in De Lange, 1994:209).

Governmental strategies for environmental policy evolved from attempts to curb and eliminate negative effects during the early 1970s to policies geared more towards prevention and sustainable development during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), published in 1989, detailed a program that aimed to solve environmental problems and to achieve sustainable development within one generation.

The most important environmental problems identified in a 1992 report by the Scientific Advisory Council to the Government (WRR), were: energy use and emission problems; acidification; waste problems; and organic wastes, especially manure. The manure problem is a specifically Dutch problem due to intensive livestock husbandry on very small land areas. Other problems identified in the report were water management and traffic congestion. More intense water management, such as the lowering of groundwater levels in spring, and irrigation in summer, have contributed to a tripling of agricultural production between 1950 and 1990. Such intensive agriculture also contributes to the aridity of increasingly large areas. Traffic congestion is a daily experience for many commuters. "The Dutch economic success manifests itself in increasing 'space-claims'" (WRR, 1998:64). Although car density per capita is average compared to other Western European countries, all activity takes place on a much smaller land area, which leads to problems. A further complication "for a small country such as the Netherlands is the international nature of many environmental problems" (CPB, 1996:7). For example, the five major rivers entering the country bring with them many pollutants from countries upstream.

How will the ambitious program set out in the first NEPP and confirmed in the second NEPP (1993) be accomplished? "An important feature of the policy is the way it gives responsibility to defined target groups in society. Companies and individuals are called on to accept their responsibilities and urged to behave in a more environmentally friendly way" (VROM, 1997:14). Although the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM), responsible for setting environmental policy and targets, talks about "defined target groups", it only identifies companies and individuals. The WRR, in a 1998 report on spatial planning, expressed the difficulty of identifying target groups in modern Dutch society:

> The simplicity of the formerly existing corporatistic structures as channelization of citizen involvement, is replaced by a much less transparent, reflexive society of involved citizens and the changing connections by which they group themselves. (p. 117)

It remains problematic to find a way to address individuals or call them to responsibility as a group, except perhaps as 'consumers'. But where lies the responsibility of a consumer?

# CHAPTER 3

## Calvinist faith versus capitalism - The LMC: composition, origins, beliefs and the concept of cultural disobedience

Literature on sustainable development often speaks of the necessity of a reduction of the use of resources and the accompanying waste and pollution in the industrialized nations. Under the neo-liberal paradigm, a "win-win" solution is often advocated, reasoning that resource-use and waste can be reduced by increased efficiency, while at the same time maintaining economic growth. Others question the "win-win" scenario, especially in light of the necessity of less-developed countries to claim their fair share of the world's resources. The "strong" conception of sustainability thus combines ecologically sound development with economically and socially just development for *all* nations. In this sense, the idea of sustainable development challenges the neo-liberal capitalist paradigm and pleads for an alternative vision of society.

This qualitative case-study of the LMC examines this movement as an example of a group that attempts to put into practice and live an alternative vision of society, closely following strong sustainability principles. I especially focus on the ideas and practice of sober living, or voluntary simplicity, in order to examine the possible contribution it may make to reductions in consumption in an industrialized, western nation. The following chapters offer a descriptive narration of the movement, its members, beliefs and actions. This chapter looks at the origins of the movement, its organizational form, the composition of its membership, their basic beliefs and values, and its placement in a wider context. It also takes a close look at the concept of cultural disobedience and how it expresses the beliefs and values of the LMC. I further examine the ways in which the LMC views social, political and economic conditions and how it views the ways in which social change must come about.

Throughout the following three chapters I use quotes by LMC members, its leadership, or from its literature to illustrate and support the narrative. These quotes are contained in the shaded boxes throughout the text. Occasionally, quotes are used from outsiders to the LMC, in order to illustrate or illuminate a certain point.

### *Decline and renewal*

The LMC members and leadership realize that the movement's membership is declining and that they are in a stage of rebuilding. The founder of the movement and his wife expressed their concerns as follows:

> A movement, as sociology proves, has a certain lifespan and then it either revitalizes or it does not survive. We are in that time now. Either we must revitalize the movement, or it dies.
> Dr. A.W. Kist (I 5)
>
> There is a great deal of exhaustion, because people have tried for so long.
> Els Kist (I 5)

The 'Landelijk Missionair Collectief' - referred to as LMC - is in a state of decline. Its membership has declined from 1,200 members at the formation of the movement in 1986, to just over 800 members in 1999. Not all of these members are active. The number indicates those who subscribe to the bi-monthly LMC publication 'The Bulletin'. The movement is financed by a low subscription fee for the Bulletin, and by voluntary additional donations to the work of the movement. The only paid employee of the movement is a part-time secretary at their bureau in the city of Amersfoort.

The decline of the movement is most likely due to the age of its membership. Most members are over fifty years of age, many are well into their sixties and seventies. The founder and leader of the movement, Dr. A.W. Kist, is eighty-three years old. The average age of members listed on the mailing list is 62.9[9]. One of the members, an elderly lady in her eighties, expressed the difficulty of physically engaging in protests and actions:

> I am not hanging from fences anymore, I am too old for that. Ans Tichelman (I 10)

Many members still support the movement and want to see it succeed, but do not have the energy to be actively involved in either the steering committee, or in particular actions.

The members of the movement are mostly from Calvinist Protestant backgrounds, either Dutch Reformed or Christian Reformed (about 75 to 80%). Some of the other members are from a Roman Catholic background, with some not affiliated to any institutional church. The members generally have a middle to upper level social, educational and economic status background. Most have or had white collar occupations and the movement is supported by many academic and professional members. The members appear to live traditional lives. Most are married and have children who have now left the parental home. Politically, they appear to favour social-democratic values. A large number of LMC supporters vote for the Green-Left party in national and European elections. Green-Left is a coalition of the former radical socialist, communist and evangelical political parties. The membership of the LMC seems to be fairly balanced along gender lines, with an even number of males and females.

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[9] This is the average of subscribers whose ages were listed. Of individuals listed 315 stated their age, 454 did not.

The quotes below, from members and leaders of the movement, illustrate some of the difficulties of maintaining the movement as such, and some of the reasons for its decline:

> The attraction of the LMC - which at the same time has also been its downfall - is the broad and inclusive approach to global problems. Co Baart (I 8)
>
> The LMC needs to be more clear: what do we really want?
>
> A group, a movement, can only exist if it has an engine that makes it go.
> Joop Janssen (I 9)
>
> The LMC is on a downward slope, but so is the peace movement. Perhaps the problem is that these movements all deal with problems that do not directly and immediately impact the daily lives of the people involved.
> J. Bakker (I 6)

The LMC's organizational form, intentionally, is very flat. It sees itself as a network of people with common beliefs. The organization does not have a board with powers to decide on particular actions. The WOD (Workgroup for Consultation and Service) functions as a steering committee, rather than as a decision-making body. Members are regularly consulted, either through questionnaires, or at the annual national meetings. The expectation is, and always has been, that direction for action will come from the broad member base. Although this is very democratic, it is rather cumbersome when it comes to deciding on particular actions or mobilizing the membership. It has resulted in a lack of focus and a certain apathy and lack of direction.

Action - political, social and cultural - and the forms and implementation of this action, are focused in the local groups. Initially, the LMC had about thirty local workgroups, who met regularly, studied the problems and initiated individual and political activities. In 1987 and the following years, many of the groups became involved in local church groups, following an initiative of the World Council of Churches. The WCC launched the 'Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' (JPIC) at its worldwide assembly in Vancouver in 1983. The Dutch Council of Churches began a process of implementation in 1987. The LMC, whose concerns run parallel to the ideas embodied in the JPIC process, encouraged its groups to become involved and offer their support. In 1989 72% of the member churches of the Dutch Council of Churches participated in the JPIC process, which dropped to 46% by 1992[10]. The WCC, however, decided to bring the JPIC process to a close after only three years of work, and many of the original LMC groups folded along with the JPIC groups. They were never resurrected. Today, there are only two active groups left.

The LMC steering committee, in its attempts to revitalize the movement, is now faced with the task of attempting to mobilize a membership which consists of a number of individuals. The local group as a source of suggestions and implementation of action, has disappeared.

### *Three-fold renewal: faith, churches and society*

The LMC's stated goals are: one, renewal of faith; two, renewal of the churches; and three, renewal of society. This renewal is to take place in the context of the values of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The founder of the movement refers to the lack of a political agenda and emphasizes the educational aspects of the work of the LMC:

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[10] See Bos (1990) and Schennink (1992) for studies on the JPIC process in the Netherlands and an analysis of the extent and forms of participation and results. Ellingsen (1993) considers the issues addressed in the JPIC process

> The LMC does not have any specific political ambitions. We work for a changed attitude, different mentalities, different social behaviours. A.W. Kist (I 4)

The LMC looks to the churches and its institutional and international organization for social initiatives and strategies which it can support and implement. As an organization dedicated to a three-fold renewal, it also attempts to influence the thinking about and direction of initiatives within the churches and its larger bodies.

Rooted firmly within Protestantism and Calvinism, the LMC takes much of its inspiration from bodies such as the World Council of Churches[11]. One of the clearest forerunners of the LMC is the "New Life-Style" initiative of the World Council of Churches, which operated from 1974 to 1981. In the 1960s and 1970s the western world began discussing the desirability of endless economic growth and the less desirable consequences of such growth. Publications such as *Blueprint for Survival* and the report *Limits to Growth* of the Club of Rome, unleashed a debate in many of the industrialized nations. The findings of both reports reinforced concerns that unlimited growth could threaten the very survival of life on earth. This led to a growing awareness that the lifestyles and consumption demands of the industrialized societies were partly to blame for the increasing gap between rich and poor nations. Coupled to this awareness was an increased appreciation of the impact of economic growth on the environment in terms of

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nothing new, but the new element is the fact that the problems are now "systematically organized and connected as dimensions of the same problematic reality" (p.148).

pollution and depletion of resources. Dutch society especially paid much attention to this discussion, perhaps because as a small and densely populated country it noticed the side-effects sooner than other countries. The churches paid attention and held their own discussions. One result of these discussions was a call by the WCC for a "new life-style". The resolution adopted by the WCC reads as follows:

> The WCC encourages all attempts to frame new lifestyles, in which a responsibility is expressed for present and future generations.
>
> ...in view of the very critical food situation in numerous parts of the world...a revision of the composition of our food consumption as well as a sparing use of minerals and energy are necessary.
>
> ...the Council of Churches addresses its member churches asking them to appeal to their memberships to observe a *weekly day of fasting*. This day serves as a *symbolic,* but also a *practical exercise* in a more embracing new lifestyle, focused at a society in which the right of the poor will be put first and foremost, both in personal and in societal life.
>
> ...the energy and money saved ought to be destined to clear and transparent programs for renewal of the society, both international and in the direct neighbourhoods. Quoted in Van Steenbergen and Feller, 1977:287)

In 1975, the Dutch Council of Churches reacted to this call by forming a 'Work Group on New Life-styles', under the authority of the Section for Social Problems of the council. "It is generally known from research that Dutch believers are convinced and very active" (Janssen, 1998:115). This showed itself in the fact that in 1977 approximately 1,000 church groups were actively engaged with questions of a 'new life-style'. "The great majority of these groups were church-affiliated (94%) and over 50% of these groups described themselves as ecumenical or interchurch groups" (van Steenbergen and Feller, 1977:288). According to van Steenbergen and Feller, personal

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[11] The World Council of Churches (WCC) is an ecumenical alliance of Christian Churches, founded in 1948, uniting Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in one body. The WCC has 336 member churches on all

change in these groups took two forms: a change of attitude and a change of behaviour. For some it included the addition of sociopolitical actions, such as the financial adoption of Third World projects, local support of political action, and the support of refugees[12].

Jaap van der Sar, secretary of the 'New Life-style' work group at the time, related the difficulties of the implementation of a personally responsible, more sober life-style:

> The problem we ran into when we tried to implement the idea of a new life-style, was the "pastry-question". If you opt for a new lifestyle, are you allowed to have a piece of pastry at a birthday party[13]? This is an individualistic approach to a collective problem.
>
> Jaap van der Sar, Kerk en Wereld (I 1)

The 'pastry-question' mentioned in the quote above was especially present in the first phases of the process, and affected the image of the project as it was reported in the media. The second phase of the project therefore emphasized the structural level of problems connected to the side-effects of continuous economic growth and consumption demands (I 1). Van der Sar illustrates his perception of the interconnectedness of individual and structural change as follows:

> If you try to implement a new life-style only at the individual level and think that you can change society that way, that is naive. But if you try to make changes only at the structural level...I would call that dishonest. Jaap van der Sar (I 1)

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continents, in 120 countries and represents roughly 500 million Christians.

[12] For a more in-depth discussion of the 'new life-style' movement see Bart van Steenbergen and Gordon Feller: "Emerging Life-Style Movements: Alternatives to Overdevelopment", in *Alternatives, V, (1979-1980), 275-305*, and Peter Ester: "Attitudes of the Dutch Population on Alternative Lifestyles & Environmental Deterioration", published by the Institute for Environmental Studies: Free University of Amsterdam, 1978. Van Steenbergen and Feller discuss the 'new life-style' movement in comparison to the voluntary simplicity movement in North America.

[13] Birthdays are very important dates for celebration in the Netherlands. The celebration always includes the presentation of pastries at work and at home, to mark the occasion.

Van der Sar relates that the approach to structural change took the form of discussion groups, who informed themselves of the nature and background of the problems. Members were encouraged to become involved in political parties, labour unions or action groups. Many of the groups involved themselves with actions against nuclear weapons and cruise missiles, an issue that was high on the political agenda in the late 1970s. As previously mentioned, by 1981 the World Council of Churches decided to not further promote the 'new life-styles' process (I 1).

In the time period between the 'New Life-Styles' initiative and the 'Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation' initiative of the World Council of Churches, the LMC organized. Its initiator, Dr. A.W. Kist - a retired lawyer, church educator, judge and theologian - received more than a thousand calls from people across the country following the publication of interviews with him in *Trouw*, a major daily Christian newspaper, and *Hervormd Nederland,* the weekly magazine of the Dutch Reformed church. In these interviews he expressed his concern with the state of the world. He spoke of the ongoing hunger and poverty for many of the world's people; materialism and consumerism; the increasingly deciding role given to economic considerations; the distribution of wealth nationally and internationally; and the churches' failure to address these issues.

Following a national meeting of those interested in what Dr. Kist had to say, the LMC organized into 30 local groups and the steering committee (the WOD).

> The LMC is a movement of Christians from all churches and faith communities, who are concerned with the increasing seriousness of global problems and the materialistic thinking and acting in the Western world, which lies at the base of these problems. The LMC calls for 'Cultural

> Disobedience': a different life-style against the wrong trends of our time. From the position of a deepening of faith and of reflection on global problems, the LMC wishes to actively engage with society for changes in the structures of society and churches.
>
> *From the LMC brochure: 'Cultural Disobedience'* (B 9)

The brochure outlines a number of concrete steps, which could be followed: a) 'keeping of the Wednesday' - simple living on this day or fasting, and destining the money saved for development projects in the Third World; b) giving of Tenths of Time, to work on specific projects, engage in meditation or study; c) participation in Snowball Actions - writing letters and sending telegrams to political authorities to protest against certain policies; d) responsible use of the environment, for example, by participation in a program of ecological bookkeeping; e) purchase of 'pure coffee' - coffee[14] which is grown by cooperatives who receive a fair price for their product; f) participation in 'pure banking' - supporting those alternative banks which invest their money in socially responsible, development, and/or 'green' projects; g) protest against the growth-economy.

Comparison of the LMC's statement and practical suggestions to the statement of the World Council of Churches regarding the 'new lifestyles' program, shows that the LMC's program is a closely related follower of the WCC initiative. Factored into the current strong attempt at revitalization of the LMC is discontent with the short duration of the WCC's programs, both the new lifestyle initiative and the JPIC program. The World Council of Churches is considered not much better than politicians who also consider only the short term. Dealing with the width and breadth of global problems requires staying power over the long term (I 4).

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[14] "Coffee is a national institution...A cup of coffee marks all goings out and comings in. It is the point around which friendships, funerals, birthdays and office life pivot. The average Dutch person gets through 165 litres of the stuff each year" (Bolt, 1995:28).

The basic values of the LMC are an interpretation of Christian teachings, which promotes: a strong sense of personal responsibility; solidarity with all of humankind, present and future generations, and with other species and the earth; simplicity and sober living; and self-discipline, or the necessity of setting social and personal limits. These values indicate an "intentional change orientation, or a deliberate stance of opposition to the dominant society" (McGuire, 1992:214). The question arises why a new movement was necessary, when numerous movements and action groups in the Netherlands concern themselves with almost any problem imaginable, both nationally and internationally. Most respondents replied that the attraction of the LMC was in its emphasis on the unity of faith and action, and on taking personal responsibility for the state of the world. "Historically, religion has been one of the most important motivations for change, because of its particular effectiveness in uniting people's beliefs with their actions, their ideas with their social lives" (McGuire, 1992:221). The LMC functions as a supplier of information and support to its adherents, in their attempts at uniting their faith with their daily actions.

### *Cultural disobedience: a vehicle for connecting faith to action*

The concept of 'cultural disobedience' is the vehicle by which LMC members connect faith, values and beliefs to action. The following quotes are selected responses to the question: What is cultural disobedience?

Living simple, making conscious choices, don't join the trends to want everything. (Q 5)

Making small sacrifices because of one's principles. (Q 7)

I think it is being critical. Critical about what you buy, how you live. Ans Tichelman (I 10)

Cultural disobedience - the terminology does not really appeal to me. I am very involved in the peace and women's movements. It is more pleasant there, not so heavy. At least you can laugh once in a while, although the goals are very much the same. Nel Baart (I 7)

Register a protest when you meet injustice. Joop Jansen (I 9)

It is not going by the book, following all the existing rules. When you see some place where you can make a difference, you act.. Cees Cooijmans (I 13)

A necessity! (Q 4)

The concept of 'cultural disobedience' is the vehicle through which LMC members connect faith and action. Cultural disobedience is defined by Dr. Kist as: "Resisting the wrong trends of our time by living differently"(D 2). In this instance culture needs to be defined further. Kist defines culture as: "the totality of what human beings have wrought on the basis of their worldviews, norms and values" (D 2). This is what Hart (1996:88) calls "the whole way of life of a human community".

In publications of the LMC cultural disobedience is explained in different ways: "Living as God meant us to, is only possible if we impose limits on ourselves and consider the Creator, Creation and fellow Creatures" (B 6). Those who practice cultural disobedience are set apart, exhibit a willingness to sacrifice, and live differently rather than in the service of idols. Cultural disobedience is a critical attitude towards one's own culture, but it is also obedience to the message of the Bible (B 4). Bernard Rootmensen, in his book *40 Words in the Desert* supplies this definition:

> "Cultural Disobedience ultimately means nothing less than being obedient to
> the light and not the darkness
> to peace and not to anarchy
> to rights and not to the right of the strongest
> to hope and not to desperation
> to grace and not to the law
> to wisdom and not to insanity
> This obedience has everything to do with taking serious the message of prophets and apostles" (Bulletin Nr. 062).

Where is this critical stance towards the culture expected to lead? What are the ultimate goals the LMC wants to accomplish? By taking a stance of disobedience to the prevailing culture, the LMC withholds legitimization from the culture. It looks for its legitimization to transcendental values. The concept also carries with it the conviction that society and culture are, to a large extent, human constructions. There is a realization that injustices have become embedded in the social structures of society, but the structures are not an entity in and of themselves. They are the product of collective human behaviour. Structures are the lifestyles, the forms of existence, of many people. Change must therefore come from a radical change in the orientation of the people who keep the structures and sub-structures alive (D 2). The belief system tends to define the social situation in terms of the sum of all individual shortcomings, embedded and institutionalized in structures. For a different social situation to come about, individual shortcomings and the structural totality of these shortcomings, must be mitigated and sacrifices must be made.

Such sacrifices must be made consciously, rather than be accepted as structural results of the system, as is expressed in *the Red Economy Booklet:*

Cultural disobedience demands sacrifices, but these are different from the automatism of sacrifices in the free market economy. The automatic sacrifices are anonymous. They are made involuntarily by those who are poor in life-chances and are due to mechanisms of the system. The victims are not recognized in the prevailing economic system. (B 13)

Sacrifices therefore are to be made voluntarily, by those who have much, in the form of moderation of incomes, and restraint in the use of natural resources (B 19). The goal of the practice of the values of simplicity, solidarity and responsibility is nothing less than the end of radical social change. As its blueprint for a changed society, the LMC holds out the biblical vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. A kingdom where there is peace, justice and the integrity of creation is maintained (D 2).

### *The LMC's views of social conditions: enough is enough*

In order to advocate change, a view of what is must be in place before a comprehensive vision of what ought to be can be articulated. What is the view of the LMC of social conditions, and what does it consider the main problems? Following are selected interview responses to the question: What are the main problems you are concerned with?

Everything is about 'more'. We never talk about 'enough'. Co Baart (I 8)

We swear by economic growth, including the Christian political parties. They also say that we have to grow, otherwise we don't survive. Hans Bakker (I 6)

One of the norms of the postmodern individual is a lack of commitment. They have fewer expectations. A.W. Kist (I 5)

I think the biggest problem is that we (in the West) don't see others as having the same values and rights as we do. We don't see them as just human beings, who also have a right to their spot in the sun and a right to a good life. We Westerners should not try to always get everything we can get. Nel Baart (I 7)

The LMC sees Western industrialized society as 'overdeveloped'[15] and marked by a 'fetishism of money'. Rather than a simple tool to facilitate the trading of goods, money dominates all facets of life. At the basis of the overdevelopment of Western societies is the economic hegemony of the neo-liberal free market society. The mechanisms of the free market have put us all in an immoral, competitive race of inequals, creating an "I"-cratic society. Other marks of the current culture are the dominance of power, violence, reason and the yearning for comfort (B 2).

Although many problems are discussed in the literature of the LMC, and in its publication 'the Bulletin', seven specific areas of concern form recurring themes:

1) The international (dis)order of the free-market economy. Literature published by the LMC challenges belief in the neo-liberal capitalist model by isolating certain articles of faith and stating resolutions in personal terms:

> I wish to resist the 'trend-culture': a psychological, commercial trick to increase sales. Neither do I wish to participate in the economic principle that money always needs to generate more money.
>
> I will train myself to live in an economy of sufficiency, knowing that there is enough for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's desires.
>
> From the LMC publication *18 Small Steps towards Change* (B 15)

> The economy has taken over our culture, colonized it as it were. The economy is the horse, culture the rider. Without the horse, the rider goes nowhere. But a good rider never lets the horse determine the direction. In our society the horse, the economy, determines the direction. She is

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[15] The concept of overdevelopment was first developed by Johan Galtung in: Galtung, J., et. al., 'Measuring World Development', *Alternatives I,* 1, March 1975, pp. 131-158. Galtung says that a society enters a stage of overdevelopment when material progress fails to promote social values or create new ones. For a brief discussion see: Van Steenbergen, Bart and Gordon Feller: 'Emerging Life-Style movements: Alternatives to Overdevelopment?', *Alternatives V,* 1979-1980, pp. 275-305.

dragging the culture along.

Dutch Sociologist Laeyendecker, quoted by Hans Bakker (D 40)

The economy is discussed in detail in an LMC publication: *The Red Economy Booklet*[16] (B 13). "Red" in this context is used as the colour of danger, that which gives a warning. The booklet presents a short history of economics, from feudalism, to Enlightenment and Adam Smith, to the current free market model. A discussion of the specific problems of the free market pinpoints the lack of value placed on that which has no price under the current economic system, such as non-wage labour, and the environment; the power of oligopolies and multi-nationals to circumvent price mechanisms and national laws, and externalize costs; the capital flight from poor countries to speculative investment in the financial markets; and the capital invested in the military-industrial complex. It further discusses the problems of continuing economic growth, and the side-effects this generates in the form of pollution and resource depletion. The authors of the booklet argue that increases in productivity are possible in the industrial and manufacturing sectors of the economy, but that increases in productivity are problematic in the service industry. A teacher cannot teach 4% more in every year; a nurse cannot nurse 4% more every year, a police officer cannot police 4% more every year. If these sectors, health care, education and justice, still demand 4% more income to keep up with the industrial sector, their relative cost to society rises. The paradox of shrinking government involvement and investment in these 'care' sectors of society, combined with their increased relative cost to society, is therefore untenable.

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[16] This booklet was also published in German under the title "Das Rote Haushaltsbuch".

A further difficulty in the free market economy is the creation of artificial perceptions of scarcity. Marketing and advertising especially create this sense of scarcity. The effects of this economic pressure affect our sense of time, leading to a rushed existence in the pursuit of 'scarce' goods.

2) The totalitarian 'Verwissenschaftlichung'[17] of culture.

> I maintain that the well-being of humans and of nature must top the agenda of scientific, social and economic activities.
>
> From the LMC publication *18 Small Steps Towards Change* (B 15)

Science is used as a deciding norm, rather than as a tool for decision making. Science is based only on what is physically observable and measurable, on what is predictable and immediately useable. The artificial world created by science and technology ignores human qualities, needs and desires.

3) Massive unemployment and underemployment and an 'economic dualism' between those with and those without paid labour. The LMC presented their position against economic dualism when they participated in the workgroup 'The Poor Side of the Netherlands' and argued for a delinking of work and income, to end the dualism:

> We resisted the government attitude of work, work, work - income, income, income. Rather we looked at the division of strengths in society and the division of the total pie.
>
> Joop Jansen, representative of the LMC in the Work Group: The Poor Side of the Netherlands (I 9)

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[17] A German term, used by the LMC to indicate the dominance of science and rationality.

At the base of this dualism is the connection between labour and income: "a form of societal discrimination where only paid labour is counted". The LMC publication 'The Bulletin', no. 50 quotes a question posed by economist Willem Hoogendijk: "Why should labour carry the costs of unemployment, rather than the energy and machines that cause that same unemployment?"

4) Hunger and poverty, especially in the Third World, but also increasingly in the Western industrialized nations. The LMC publication quoted below makes a clear connection between the problems of waste in the industrialized nations and reliance on importation of many of these same resources from the developing nations.

> I will accept the 'other' and will ally myself with all those who fight hunger, poverty, war and destruction of nature....I wish to resist the 'throw-away' culture. All we throw away is a destruction of resources. Because we import many of the resources, often from the poor third world, it is not right to treat this carelessly.
>
> From the LMC publication *18 Small Steps Towards Change* (B 15)

The roots of the problem are firmly placed with the economic and military power of the West. There remains a net transfer of 100 billion dollars annually from poor countries to rich countries. Annual global spending on weapons is still higher than the combined annual income of the poorest half of the world population (B 13).

5) The environmental problems of waste, pollution, depletion of resources and the extinction of species.

> I will attempt to prevent all unnecessary use of water, gas and electricity.
>
> I will actively clean up messes wherever I can. In front of my door, in my street, in my town and elsewhere.

I will change my food consumption to eat less meat, eat vegetables in season and drink coffee produced by cooperatives who have received a fair value for their products.
From the LMC publication *18 Small Steps Towards Change (*B 15)

The causes of these problems are connected to the philosophy of endless economic growth and the externalization of costs. The value of the environment in economic theory is set to zero. This makes it possible for the small and densely-populated Netherlands to imprint a much too large "ecological footprint" on the earth, without the costs associated with it. The 'ecological footprint' is "a measure of the 'load' imposed by a given population on nature. It represents the land area necessary to sustain current levels of resource consumption and waste discharge by that population" (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996:5). The 'ecological footprint' of the Netherlands is calculated at 3.32 hectares per capita. This represents fifteen times more land than lies in the country's own political boundaries. "Dutch government data suggest that for fodder alone (including that used to produce food products for export) the Netherlands appropriates 100,000 to 140,000 square kilometres of arable land, much from the Third World" (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996:94). This indicates a form of ecological deficit accounting, which is not as yet acknowledged.

6) The 'social surplus value' accorded to males over females.

I commit to learning to think of 'human beings' only. Not the duality of males and females. Not the duality of Europeans and others. Not the duality of North and South. Only 'human beings'.

From the LMC publication: *18 Small Steps Towards Change* (B 15)

The LMC argues that the paid labour of males is still valued at a higher price than that of females. Moreover, the social status accorded to males and the decision-making power accompanying the higher percentage of males in positions at the top levels of management and politics further devalue the female.

7) The nuclear arms race and the military-industrial complex.

> I refuse to respect every form of power which does not also accept responsibility.
> From the LMC publication *18 Small Steps Towards Change* (B 15)

The LMC publication *Non-violent Resistance* (B 10) asks the question: "How will this culture, a camel loaded with thousands of nuclear warheads, ever pass through the eye of the needle?" Society shows a continued inclination to solve problems of violence with additional violence. Much violence is caused by and embedded in the social and economic structures of societies. In order to truly create the conditions for peaceful co-existence, the root causes of the problems must be addressed.

These specific problems and the ways they are discussed in LMC publications and literature are addressed in terms of global economic systems and organization and the power structures embedded in this form of organization (Bulletin Nr. 070). What does the LMC propose to bring about changes in the economic structures and organization? How does it view the social and cultural changes which must accompany a radical re-structuring of society necessary to bring about the society envisioned?

### *The LMC's view of social change: planning the route to a new society*

Change and resolution of the societal problems as viewed by the LMC, will not come overnight, by a sudden change in policies. Change can occur through processes only. There must be a process of awakening and education, a process of mental and structural de-coding of the current structures (Q 2). There is no shortage of ideas, suggestions, or alternatives, therefore change is a process of will. Selected responses from interviews and questionnaires to questions about social change indicate the importance of consciousness raising, education, and learning, both at the individual and societal levels.

| | |
|---|---|
| The exchange of ideas between people: that's where you find indications and possibilities to come to a new culture formation. | A.W. Kist (I 5) |
| Essential for a culture are ways of thinking, attitudes and behaviours of people, in short their way of life. | Piet Haanemaaijer (I 16) |
| We can not say to the chimpanzee: 'I know you can count to five'. You need to interact and educate intensively for a long period of time. | A.W. Kist (I 5) |
| Protest is putting the problem on the table of the institutions. | Joop Jansen (I 9) |
| Our societal structures create the problems, and society needs to offer the solutions. | (Q 12) |
| In the multicultural society there is a change from the missionary to the dialogue. We need to learn from each other. | Nel Baart (I 7) |

Change does not necessarily mean a return to any form of the 'good old days'. Economic, scientific, and technological developments have brought much good and have changed the lives of many for the better. No one really wants to go back. Concern rests with the side-effects of progress, the way in which individuals use the products of development and the effects of processes and products on our culture and on the countries of the Third World. The side effects produce victims and the victims often are neither taken care of nor acknowledged (Q 11).

A society that fixates on economic and technological solutions and possibilities possibly loses sight of what it is to be human. The *Red Economy Booklet* (B 13) draws on the work of Hanna Ahrendt who discusses in *The Human Condition* what it is that makes us human. She argues that a human being: one, cannot live without an other; two, is an inextricable part of nature; and three, is connected to time: a person is born, becomes an adult, and dies. The authors of the *Red Economy Booklet* argue that modern culture views these essential characteristics of humanity as restrictions, limitations to one's freedom. Modern culture strives for: one, individual independence; two, overcoming the restrictions nature places on us; and three, postponement of death and prolongation of life by all means possible. For example, medical technology must be used to the limits in every case. Escape from limitations causes an enormous increase in what are considered human needs, in turn creating a sense of scarcity.

Escape from limitations most often involves a reliance on scientific or technological innovation. Fixation on technological solutions, however, leads us down the garden path of more production. Reliance on technical solutions to technical negative side-effects means that over-production must be solved by even more production, with its accompanying side-effects. It is akin to the belief that one can pull oneself out of quicksand by one's own hair. Thinking about solutions remains static in the same pattern, the patterns of the current culture. To withdraw support from the current culture, from these static patterns, is to become culturally disobedient. Although the process of cultural disobedience is focused on each individual acting differently in one's own life, the ultimate goal of cultural disobedience is to change the structures of society. "Unless an action has the changing of structures as its goal, it won't solve anything" (*The Red Economy Booklet*: B 13:31). Questioning the results of individual action is a question grounded in the current culture itself: results must be measurable, something needs to be produced. The LMC considers action, individual and collective, an indication of the direction in which it wishes society to travel. Action is part of the "route-planning" on the road to a vision of the desired outcomes.

Bob Goudzwaard and Harry De Lange, two supporters and advisors to the LMC, articulated a vision of an economy which is not based on the growth model in their book: *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards an Economy of Care* (1995). They call their model an 'economy of enough'. Prosperity is not a goal but rather a means to the end of a caring society. The WRR (the Dutch Scientific Advisory Council to the Government) included this model in a study published in 1983, in which the Council worked out the implications of three economic models: one, a balanced growth economy; two, an export focused economy; and three, an economy of enough. It concluded that an 'economy of enough', compared to the two other plans, would show very little economic growth, but that employment would increase and pollution and resource-depletion would decrease. The council calculated that consumption would need to decline by 15% to realize such an economic scenario (B13).

An 'economy of enough' is one of the aspects of the new society the LMC envisions and attempts to put into practice. Other desired aspects include: economical priority for the Third World; democratically controlled international political and economic organizations; democratic control of banks, financial markets and institutions, and multinationals; a federal organizational form for the United Nations; human size and small-scale organization and technology; worker participation; and the inclusion of an enforceable social statute in the charter of corporations (D 2).

But where does one begin with changes of this magnitude? First of all, the LMC argues that societies must begin to acknowledge their collective complicity in an immoral world system. Secondly, change must occur at all levels of society, from the individual to the institutional. A particular focus of the LMC are the institutional churches, who must begin to convincingly fulfill their public responsibilities (D 5). "Religious movements contribute ethical criteria and value systems on the basis of their traditions, but increasingly also on an inter-faith basis and in interreligious cooperation" (Kairos Europe, 1998:10). Thirdly, change must occur at the level of individual attitudes and behaviour. At this level, processes of education and consciousness raising are important.

The LMC functions especially well in the areas of education and dissemination of knowledge, through their publication 'the Bulletin', through educational workshops, and national gatherings. Behavioural change must accompany and follow changes in attitude and awareness levels in order to effect change in the larger society.

As I have shown in this chapter, the composition of the membership of the LMC is mostly middle-aged or elderly, well-educated, middle- to upper class and of Calvinist Protestant backgrounds. As such, they could be identified as part of the new social class of specialists with professional identities, theorized by Kriesi (1989). Based on his study of new social movements in the Netherlands, Kriesi identifies this new social class of "social and cultural specialists with professional identities but without organizational assets" as a genuinely new class, existing in opposition to technocrats with organizational assets. These social and cultural specialists are most likely to support new social movements, but Kriesi argues that it is only the younger generation of this new social class that does so. It appears that either Kriesi is wrong, or the LMC is an exceptional case, which perhaps explains why the movement is marginal. Nevertheless, the description of the membership of the LMC as social and cultural specialists without organizational assets is a fitting one. A movement such as the LMC allows this social class to lead a politicized existence in a climate where the technocrats have the inside track.

The movement has failed to attract the younger generation of social and cultural specialists Kriesi speaks of, to replace its aging cohort. It is the lack of a positive message and the failure to communicate the richness of the alternatives where, I suggest, the LMC's failure to attract a younger generation of adherents can be found.

A Dutch environmental alliance for youth, (the NJMO), which represents 35 organizations with a total membership of 400,000 young people, expresses their goals as follows:

> We don't just want to say what is wrong, we want to take initiatives ourselves...We are working for a sustainable society, not only because it is necessary, but because a sustainable society can be so much nicer and *fun*...That's why the NJMO is not *against* things, but always *for* an alternative...Therefore, our message is: Sustainability is a must, is possible and is *attractive*. (NJMO, 1998:5,6; emphases added)

The NJMO quotes research that young people want to be actively involved in environmental and poverty questions, but they don't know how. They have little trust in existing structures such as politics, and definitely do not want to be perceived as "eco-freaks". Talk about changes in the western consumption society is quickly perceived as moralistic and young people think that "environmentalists always want to take something away from you" (p. 24). Their solution then is to consume, not necessarily more, but differently and environmentally-consciously. It is clear that the LMC's negative way of communicating its alternative does not reach young people and fails to attract them. I would suggest that part of the problem is that western societies do not have social institutions or traditions that would allow "the wisdom of the elders" to be heard, or transferred to the next generations.

Despite my focus on the voluntary simplicity aspects of the LMC, the movement has a much broader focus. The LMC attempts to influence politics in many different ways. How the LMC and its members attempt to respond to the challenges they encounter, both in political and cultural forms, is the subject of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 4

## The work of change: lived alternatives

The work of change is long, arduous and often not very rewarding. Slippery forms of power in complex societies make it difficult to find a foothold on the ladder to places of influence. In such situations, those who work for alternatives and the creation of a better society, pick up *the means they control*, as instruments for change. Giddens writes that "the reproduction of society is always and everywhere a skilled production of its members" (Quoted in Redclift and Woodgate, 1994:54). In some cases, the goal is not simply *re*-production, but rather the production of a different society. Members of society use the skills and instruments at their disposal to attempt to do so.

A member of one of two remaining local LMC groups expresses the importance of the presence of an opportunity for meaningful action:

> When I watch television at night, or read the newspaper, then you see that so much is happening. Sometimes it is too much, especially if it really touches you and I close myself off from it. But now there was a possibility, even in this tiny little town, to actually do something. It is a very enriching experience, for myself, for my children. You find out that there is more than going to school and Coca Cola.
>
> Addie Sonneveld on refugee work. (I 13)

If one were a cynic, one could dismiss the above as 'bourgeois idealism'. Yet, the quote reveals the speaker's essentially social understanding of the world: that which affects others, also affects the self. Watching the suffering of others tarnishes the soul, even if the other is an unknown. LMC members act, for the most part, from this understanding. They are not necessarily in immediate contact with those who are suffering, although some are or have been, but they understand that social life revolves around a mutual dependency and interaction.

For many this understanding comes from an understanding of biblical principles. As such, it is an example of what Habermas calls the "leveling out of the this world/other-worldly dichotomy", a repoliticization of the biblical inheritance (quoted in Robertson and Chirico, 1985:239). This does not give Christianity a monopoly on understandings of justice, or environmental concern. Research shows that religious orientation is not linked to environmental concern or behaviour (CBS, 1998; Dekker, Ester and Nas, 1997:456). Nor does it seem that social justice concerns are more present in religious circles than elsewhere. In this way, religious life mirrors secular life. Some do, some don't. But it is from the some who do, who are exemplars in the mainstream, that new and creative ideas will flow.

Members of the LMC, collectively and individually, act where they can. This chapter describes the various actions undertaken by the LMC as a collective, by individuals and by smaller groups. Although the emphasis, again, is on aspects of voluntary simplicity, to exclude the broadness and variety of the LMC's actions would be reductionist. I therefore include an overview of socio-political actions, collective actions, individual acts and an in-depth look at one of the remaining local groups connected to the LMC.

### *Snowball actions*

The intentionally flat organizational form of the LMC sometimes leads to difficulty in initiating collective action. When the movement first organized it had about thirty to thirty-five local groups. These groups formed the base from which action could be initiated and coordinated. Giving 'tenths' of time was the first agreement made by the members as a collective form of action. Time needs to be set aside to engage in action - either protest or direct aid - study, reflection and meditation (B 7).

An initial element of socio-political action of the LMC were the 'snowball' actions. Snowball actions are political initiatives. Each member has the opportunity to propose a protest to a political situation. The steering committee (WOD) will then consult, among themselves, but often will also solicit input from experts in the particular problematique. If the action is to take place, a concept letter and/or telegram will be drafted and representatives of groups or selected individuals undertake to spread the concept letter to other members of the LMC. Each individual member will then send either the letter or telegram to members of political parties, cabinet ministers, the premier, or other persons or institutions. This fan-out system generates a large volume of communications in a relatively short period of time (B 16).

A snowball action, according to LMC literature, is "one of the wrecking balls pounding at the walls of government castles" (B 16). A search of LMC archives uncovered snowball actions taking place during the years 1989 to 1994. In 1989 three snowballs rolled: one regarding human rights violations in South Africa; one regarding the threat of national bankruptcy in Nicaragua; and an action questioning the minimal penetration of development aid to the poorest members of Third World countries (D 36). In 1991 protests were registered against the Gulf War, which included telegrams sent to both President George Bush of the U.S.A. and Saddam Hussein of Iraq (D 33-35). LMC members petitioned the national government in 1993 for more anti-poverty policies in the Netherlands, including greater possibilities for participation in paid labour and an increase in minimum incomes (D 26).

Internationally, the former Communist countries in Eastern Europe formed the subject of a letter writing action (D 27). The LMC protested in particular against the Dutch government's use of development aid funds to finance aid to the former East-bloc countries. Concern with the situation in Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina set pens and keyboards moving in 1993 and 1994 (D 30, D 31). Concerns expressed to the government included ethnic cleansing, and the suffering of the population, especially of women. The LMC pleaded for participation in a peace-keeping force. Letter writers called on church organizations, synods, and local church governments to participate in a day of fasting in solidarity with those suffering from the upheaval (D 24).

The effectiveness of letter-writing actions is difficult to measure. Political party and government representatives send polite replies, acknowledge concerns and explain current policies. It is prudent to assume that the volume of correspondence generated will influence the effectiveness of the action. Although a precise count could not be made from the materials available, I estimate between two and four hundred letters and/or telegrams were generated per action.

The only snowball action that concerned Dutch circumstances directly, involved the anti-poverty campaign. Some see this as problematic:

> The problem is that we always picked something that was far away. As a Dutch group you need to keep it simple, look at what is wrong in your own country first.
>
> Joop Jansen (I 9)

The LMC represented its members in numerous national organizations and councils. One of these was the Work Group on the Poor Side of the Netherlands, a government initiative which gathered representatives from many organizations and government bodies to study the problem of poverty and to make recommendations. The LMC also joined the National Alliance for Sustainability. The snowball actions and representation in other organizations appear to have disappeared along with the disappearance of most of the local groups and the resulting lack of manpower.

*Forms of cultural disobedience*

The national annual meeting of the LMC in 1989 approved the snowball action format (D 42). Many agreements and actions flowed from the annual meetings. Each meeting is organized around a particular theme, such as "Hunger", "Waste, Energy, Transportation and Water", "Renewal of the Churches", and "Justice - a matter of economics?". Each meeting deals with forms of cultural disobedience, suggestions and evaluations. The meeting considers all proposals and takes a vote on which forms of cultural disobedience to practice in the coming year. Although the agreements are not binding in the sense that the members will be called to account, the members consider themselves honour-bound to abide by the agreements.

The LMC booklet *Cultural Disobedience - some practical suggestions* contains a large number of the agreed upon acts of cultural disobedience (B 9). The suggestions are grouped under thematic headings: environment, consumption, politics, social sector, media, Third World, use of time, consciousness raising, renewal of faith and transportation issues. The different suggestions can be grouped as either attitude-change, behavioural change, and socio-political action. Agreements for changes in behaviour pertain mostly to environment, consumption, use of time and third world issues.

These changes in behaviour are very often expressed as acts of voluntary simplicity. The arena of day-to-day life offers LMC members an opportunity to exercise choice in those areas of the lifeworld they control, as expressed by the former secretary of the movement:

> People often pick up easiest on environmental problems. It is more concrete and you can implement changes in your own life and households quite easily. Joop Jansen (I 9)

Acts of voluntary simplicity vary from the use of less heat, electricity and water, to eating less meat, not using airplanes, limited use of cars - traveling a maximum of 5,000 kilometers annually, speed limited to 100 kilometers/hour or less - and limitations on all consumption, but especially luxury purchases. For a time the members agreed to engage in a system of ecological bookkeeping[18]: keeping precise measurements of energy and water use and waste generated. Time is to be used more conscientiously in order to free 10% (minimum) of one's time to participate in action or direct aid to others. Money saved by engaging in simple living is given directly to aid and development in the Third World, or is invested in banks or funds that in turn invest in development projects, socially-responsible funds, or green funds. These funds either provide a very low return on investment - with the option of re-investing or donating this return to the fund - or no return at all (B 9; D 20-22; D 47; D 47).

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[18] Based on the methods employed by 'Global Action Plan for the Earth'.

It would seem that here the circle of Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' accommodating the growth of capitalism might be broken. Weber describes the Protestant ethic as including the values of hard work, sobriety, financial care and deferred gratification. Whereas Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic showed a resulting capitalistic world, the LMC's version of the practice of Calvinist values does not necessarily result in the accumulation of capital. It circumvents this outcome by including a redistribution of wealth.

### *Cultural disobedience in everyday life: conscientious consumption, simplicity and environmental concern*

Interviews with LMC members and questionnaires returned show a variety of conscientious consumption initiatives. Many either do not own a car, or have arrangements whereby three or four families share one car. Most use public transportation to get around ,or that old Dutch standby, the bicycle. Many members also vacation within the Netherlands and do not use airplanes. I met a physics professor who has visited his relatives in Edmonton twice, both times traveling by boat and train. When I attended meetings of the steering committee (the WOD) I was the only one who arrived by car, all others arrived by train. Paper used at meetings was used on both sides, envelopes were used several times with the aid of a stick-on label. All members engage in recycling, reuse of products and reduction in purchases, especially of luxury articles. Many state that they carefully watch for the least packaging possible and often protest against over-packaging of goods. Due to space restrictions, food in the Netherlands is mostly purchased rather than home-grown. Most LMC'ers are careful to purchase vegetables in season, often organically grown. Many are either complete vegetarians, or eat several meatless meals per week. Another option exercised by some is the purchase of a vegetable-packet, which supplies enough vegetables for a household for one week. The vegetables are purchased on contract bases from organic farmers, mostly local, by a larger organization and sold by subscription. This guarantees the farmers a market for their produce and allows consumers to choose organically grown vegetables and to support local growers (I 7). About 80% of 32 respondents replied that they thought that their consumption patterns were different from the average Dutch household. Another 10% replied that they hoped so, and 10% thought their consumption patterns were not different. One added that he thought his consumption pattern was different from the average household, but that the answer depended on the standard of comparison: "Compared to those on assistance, it is probably luxurious" (Q 1).

Daily cultural disobedience is a matter of conscientious consumption, simplicity and environmentally-conscious behaviour. "Fundamentally there is something quite banal, simple and plain here...the plain old insight that human beings can change themselves, not only in such trivialities as life conduct or peculiarities of personality, but also in such major things as one's relationship to oneself, to the world and to reality" (Beck, 1995:56). Indeed, daily cultural disobedience not only involves 'such trivialities as life conduct'. Changes in life conduct *stem from,* but also *alter*, one's relationship to self, world and reality.

Cultural disobedience is expressed also in other activities. Many members are involved in other organizations. Some examples: Amnesty International, the peace movement, women's movements, solidarity groups - e.g. solidarity with Christian Base communities in Brazil, Latin-American women - and environmental movements (Q 9; Q15; Q 3; I 8).

*Collective actions: politics and responses to local problems*

Collective efforts, flowing from the annual meetings and from local groups, include a variety of activities. The 1989 meeting generated a motion to the Dutch Council of Churches to promote raising minimum income levels of households from Dfl. 15,000 to Dfl. 20,000 annually, to be financed from cuts in defence spending. Following the 1991 meeting, a group of LMC members visited the annual shareholders meeting of ABN/AMRO, one of the large Dutch banks, to plead for changes in dealing with third world debt. The meeting also commissioned a work group to prepare a lecture on economics for use in high schools (D 42). The 1992 meeting took a more direct initiative: it pledged to provide food for three days for a homeless shelter located next to the meeting hall (D 20).

Particular groups also initiated actions, pleading for various causes: tax on airplane fuel; taxes on production, pollution and resource-use, rather than on labour (eco-tax); inclusion of the costs of pollution in the price of products; resistance to automatization of production processes if it leads to higher unemployment; protests against violence in television programs; and protest against the '24-hour economy', when Dutch law was about to be changed to allow retailers to open on Sundays (D 47).

One of the local groups started a drop-in centre for "those who live on the edges of society". It provides "an extension of the living-room", where people can come for a cup of coffee, to read the newspaper, and to talk. The volunteers offer help with government documents and referral services to the appropriate agencies. The drop-in centre averages 15 visitors a day (I 9).

Some notice is taken of the LMC at the political level. A member of the group received an invitation to speak about cultural disobedience at a meeting of the Christian Democratic party in November of 1998. This same member, a historian, regularly writes a column for *Trouw*, a large Dutch daily newspaper (I 6).

*A local group: how one group unites beliefs with action*

"At a personal level, commitment to non-material fulfillment is hard to sustain without reinforcement from family, friends and neighbours" (Durning, 1991:15). The LMC's intent, from the beginning, was for the organization to be constituted as a collective of small groups. The group was intended to function as a source of both learning and doing. This concept is expressed with the Hebrew word 'dabar', meaning word and action. It expresses the essential unity of faith, knowledge and action. A quote by a member of one of the remaining groups illustrates the reinforcement function of a group with a common belief system:

> The group inspires us, we inspire and encourage each other. It is a safe place, where you can tell your stories and ask questions. It is a place where you find encouragement and maybe even a little bit of appreciation.
> Addie Sonneveld (I 13)

One of the two remaining groups consist of a group of six elderly women, who still meet every Wednesday for discussion and meditation on the articles in the Bulletin. Due to their age, they are not actively involved in any particular actions, or the organizational side of the LMC. Their personal lives, lives of sufficiency and moderation, reflect the basic values of the LMC (I 12). The membership of the second remaining group fluctuates between twelve and fifteen members. I spoke at length and in person, with five of the twelve core members of this group. The members I interviewed ranged in age from thirty-two to fifty-eight years old. Four of the five are married, two of them still have young children at home. The children of the two other married couples have left home. The in-depth look I took at this group yielded a rich variety of activities and insights. A striking finding is that the members do not consider themselves as part of the LMC, however, the LMC considers them as one of "their" groups (I 14). The group had its origins in the LMC and organized following the initial newspaper interviews with Dr. Kist and the subsequent national meeting. The only remaining link between the local group and the LMC is one of the initiators and leaders of the group, who maintains contact with the LMC. Members of the group expressed a certain dissatisfaction with the heavy loading of the concept of cultural disobedience. They prefer to take a more positive approach and had become tired of not making an impact in any meaningful way: "rowing upstream" as they call it. They looked, instead, at their immediate surroundings and activities that would produce visible results (I 13-16). The groups' members use the means they control and the skills and instruments at their disposal to work for positive change.

The group quietly inspires members to act where they see needs. One of the members inititated a refugee support group, attracting 30 people from the surrounding community interested in volunteering. Over the ten years the group has existed, it has assisted so far in re-locating and settling twelve refugee families from African and Eastern-European countries (I 13).

Another member of the group teaches biology and horticulture at a local college. His experiences in the group and the encouragement he received there, prompted him to become involved in re-writing the textbooks for biology and horticulture, to include and promote environmentally safe practices (I 16).

Some members are in the process of setting up a "care-farm". The farm is intended to provide daily activities for approximately 20 mentally handicapped adults. They will work on the farm, husbanding small livestock, growing vegetables and herbs. Cees Cooijmans, the driving force behing the care-farm, states the philosophy behind the idea of the farm:

> We want to offer our clients a holistic experience. On a farm you deal with seasons, weather, life and death. When it rains, you get wet, your hands get dirty. Animals are born, but they also die. That experience is tremendously important for mentally handicapped people and aids in their development.
>
> We react to the commercialization and commodification of the institutional places where people find work now.
>
> The cooperation with the organic farmers is very important. In that way we can work in an ecological manner and contribute to honoring the earth and the life on it.
>
> Cees Cooijmans (I 14)

An agreement is in place with two other members of the group who operate an organic farm nearby. The clients of the care-farm will work on the organic farms, providing them with a source of work and income. The organic farmers in return have a supply of labour for their labour-intensive method of growing vegetables. The farmers estimate that in order to grow food organically an increase in labour of three to four times is required.

Consumption changes, in general, are more often expressed in consuming differently, rather than less. Dyanne Schrauwen, one of the farmers involved in a transition to organic farming, sums up the difficulty of less consumption and 'correct' consumption:

> I think it is difficult to really consume less. What would you, concretely, want to miss? The questions are so complex that often you don't know what is right and what is the right choice.
> Dyanne Schrauwen (I 15)

Environmental consciousness in the Netherlands is very high. Greenpeace, for example, has as many donators in the Netherlands than in either Germany or the U.S.A., two countries with considerably larger populations (Volkskrant, Dec. 3, 1998). Translating attitudes to behaviour remains problematic, especially in terms of sustainable food consumption. "Most consumers will only begin to show environmentally-friendly food consumption behaviour, when the perceived costs in terms of time, money and effort are sufficiently lower. Sustainable food consumption, therefore, exists in dynamic tension with the desire for comfort and saving time...The chain of food production becomes longer and more complicated. The consumer loses the ability to judge the origin and quality of foods" (Van Dam, de Hoog and Ophem, 1997:3).

Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism, following the logic of a hierarchy of needs, is echoed by Dyanne when she says:

> Things are going very well in Holland, economically speaking. There are many families with dual incomes, everyone has a nice house, lots of vacations, free time. I think that the next thing is that you start paying attention to the quality of your food and your environment.
> Dyanne Schrauwen (I 15)

Currently, the demand for organically grown products outstrips the supply available in the Netherlands. The government actively promotes organic farming and supplies subsidies to carry a business during the transition period of about two years. Problems with pollution of groundwater, and the oversupply of manure caused the image of intensive agriculture to suffer immensely. Large grocery-chains now carry a selection of organic products and one of the two largest chains recently pledged to increase its selection, which has increased the demand.

The group as a whole, fluctuating between 12 and 15 members, undertakes different actions. Fifteen members participated in the Global Action Plan for the Earth's ecological bookkeeping plan for a year. Voluntary simplicity and ethical consumption were subjects of discussion and pragmatic action at other times. Many members continue to live simple lives and find support in the group for their actions, although many confess to find it difficult to 'stick to it' (I 13-16):

> We make agreements about certain things, but it always seems to slack off after a time.
> Cees Cooijmans (I 14)

"While one's heart may beat Green, one's mind and routine often enough continue in old habits" (Beck, 1995:11).

*From personal to social transformation, or vice versa?*

The project LMC members engage in is not simply one of self-limitation. As stated in the following quote from an LMC brochure, theirs is also a social project, with the goal of wide-ranging societal change.

The economic, political and military policy makers have to begin noticing that more and more people do not agree with old strategies. Increasingly, citizens plead for paths to a completely different (inter-)national future than that which the current powers envision.
From the LMC brochure *Snowball actions* (B 16)

By its acts, these citizens under the collective LMC umbrella, plead and act for paths to a completely different future. Three key characteristics of the movement constitute the motivation of the members: one, the essential unity of faith and action; two, personal faith as a point of departure for everyday living; and three, connection to hundreds of others by concrete agreements. Thus, action is an expression of norms and values originating in the subjective realm of people's everyday lives. Colonization of this realm of everyday life, as Habermas points out, leads to defensive action. "When this occurs, social movements - such as the counterculture of the 1960s or activist fundamentalism ...are the result" (Fields, 1991:182 -184).

> To the degree that the economic system subjects the life-forms of private households and the lifeconduct of consumers and employees to its imperatives, consumerism and possessive individualism, motives of performance and competition gain the force to shape behaviour. The communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalized into a utilitarian life-style; this media induced shift to purposive-rational action orientations calls forth the reaction of hedonism freed from the pressures of rationality. (Habermas, quoted in Fields, 1991:183)

LMC members, by their attitudes and life actions, precisely protest this slide into consumerism, hedonism and utilitarianism. The LMC would further argue that the reaction of hedonism is not only freed from the pressures of rationality, but also from the restraint of moral, transcendental values. Moreover, the unholy trio of consumerism, hedonism and utilitarianism, is freed from personal responsibility and any sense of solidarity with those who suffer.

By their acts of cultural disobedience, LMC'ers withhold legitimation from the current economic and political system. They have understood that the clear line Habermas draws in the sand between economic and political system and the lifeworld, is perhaps not as sharp as might be theoretically postulated. LMC members' acts testify to the belief that a dynamic interaction exists between system and lifeworld. But is it a simplification to say that the lifeworld *is* the political and economic?

The religious worldview of the members of the LMC envisions all of life as interwoven. In Habermas' division, religion would belong to the lifeworld. In the LMC's vision the lifeworld is intricately connected to the political and economic and vice versa. Chapter five will specifically look at the image the LMC uses to describe its vision of an alternative society: the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. It will further examine the wider role of religion in challenging the neoliberal paradigm.

# CHAPTER 5

## Religion and resistance

Religious motivation has an important role in the existence of the LMC. Peace and justice are long-standing concerns of the Christian churches and of other religions. The last decades have added an increasing engagement of organized religion with environmental questions. Religions thus show a lon0g history of engagement with the social world. The churches are marginalized in recent years by the current "economic" discourse, which brands "ethical, theological, or other eternal viewpoints...as moralizing and therefore not to be taken seriously" (Duchrow, 1995:20). Yet, religion refuses to be pushed completely to the sidelines. As such, religion has something to say about normative ends for society. This chapter examines the ways in which the LMC uses religious concepts, images and symbols to communicate its message. It also looks at some selected, comparable examples of other religious movements and the resources religion brings to bear on social questions of justice and the environment.

### *Towards the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth*

The biblical notion of 'The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth' is one of the main rhetorical frames used by the LMC, both as a way of identity-formation and as an external strategy. A 'frame' is

> an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses 'the world out there'...Collective action frames are cultural structures generated by movements; these explain why existing conditions are unjust, show that they are not immutable, indicate strategies for making change, and argue to potential participants that action can make a difference. (Hart, 1996:95)

The LMC strongly believes that collective and individual action are important strategies to bring about changes in the world, as evidenced by a quote from their bi-monthly publication the 'Bulletin', and by a quote from one of the members:

> Based on our faith in Christ Jesus and His Kingdom, we are convinced that we have to work on changing the current situation in the world....Gods will is the infiltration of the Kingdom into our world ('Bulletin' Nr. 00, p.3, p.8).
>
> Even if the Bible would turn out to be a fairytale, and Christ would never have existed, it wouldn't matter. The value of its (the Bible's) social message and prescription for the right relationships between people and with their environment is so great, that it would remain. Bep Marcus, LMC member (Q 6)

Kingdom symbolism is clearly directed towards the social realm and serves as an image of future change and offers alternative ways of thinking about the social world. The ideological frame of the 'Kingdom', a just, peaceful and harmonious society, thus describes the LMC's notion of the ideal, or the 'good', society and the social and cultural structures ordering life in such a society.

Williams (1995) describes a social movement's ideology as a "set of cultural resources" (p.124), and the rhetorical frame as an important type of cultural resource. He defines cultural resources as "the symbolic tools that movements wield in their efforts at social change, be they formal ideologies or symbolic-expressive actions" (p. 127). For the sources of a movement's ideology or symbolic-expressive actions, movements "tap into recognizable rhetoric and symbols" (p. 128). The 'recognizable rhetoric and symbols' the LMC draws on are based on an interpretation of the firmly encoded and established context of Judeo-Christian teaching.

"Culture-making within social movements is often carried out by people with strong commitments to pre-existing traditions" (Hart, 1996:96). Two recommendations for action the LMC makes to its members serve as examples of culture-making and symbolic-expressive action frames based on the Judeo-Christian context: one, keeping the Wednesday, and two, tenths of time.

*Keeping the Wednesday*

Keeping the Wednesday is a variation on keeping the Sabbath (or Sunday) in the Christian and Judean traditions. The Sabbath is historically considered a day of religious rest, and devotion to God, rather than to 'worldly' concerns. Keeping the Wednesday means a day set aside during the week for fasting, or simple living; time for Bible study, meditation and reflection; and expressing solidarity with those who suffer. A concrete outcome of the expression of solidarity is contained in the recommendation that money saved by fasting or simple living, should be donated to (preferably) a third world development project (D 16).

We used to keep the Wednesday when our children still lived at home. They used to call it 'crisisday'! We would eat very simply on that day and set aside the money saved for a Third World project. Nel and Co Baart, LMC members (I 7, 8)

The idea of 'keeping the Wednesday' is clearly based on one of the recommendations of the World Council of Churches when it launched its 'New Lifestyle' initiative. The resolution of the WCC, quoted more extensively in Chapter three, in part reads:

> ...the Council of Churches addresses its member churches asking them to appeal to their memberships to observe a *weekly day of fasting*. This day

> serves as a *symbolic,* but also a *practical exercise* in a more embracing new lifestyle, focused at a society in which the right of the poor will be put first and foremost, both in personal and in societal life.
>
> Quoted in Van Steenbergen and Feller, 1977:287

The LMC took this recommendation and chose Wednesday as the weekly day of fasting: a day in the middle of the workweek, to stop, reflect and yield to the rights of the poor. This day is intended to make visible the practice of cultural disobedience in a number of its expressions: unity of faith and action, solidarity with others, simple living, and concrete aid.

A large section of the LMC's bi-monthly publication 'The Bulletin' is devoted to meditations, based on Biblical themes and passages, intended to be used on each Wednesday:

> The core of the Bulletin are the meditations for every Wednesday. These are not of the usual pastoral variety, but rather concern the prophetic content of the gospel, in essence they speak about the kingdom of peace and justice. A.W. Kist (I 5)

Especially in the early years of the LMC, many groups met on Wednesday at the supper hour to discuss the meditations, and would forego the usual meal. One of the two remaining local groups, consisting of six elderly women, still meets every Wednesday and practices 'keeping the Wednesday' (I 10).

An article in Bulletin Nr. 071 (p. 30-32) describes the reasons for keeping the Wednesday. Motivation for this form of expression of cultural disobedience is found in the rhetoric of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Faith in the kingdom means that one's behaviour must express the desired values contained in this vision of the 'good' society.

"It is clear that our western society serves Mammon[19]...Everywhere we smell the stink of Mammon-worship and notice the addictive, magnetic, almost irresistible powers of the money-culture" (p.30). Keeping the Wednesday is a form of resistance to this money-culture and its accompanying consumerism. By keeping the Wednesday, members practice the attributes of self-discipline, setting personal limits, and restraint in the use of resources. The underlying motivation is that this personal restraint and limitation will free resources for those who do not now receive their just share of the earth's resources. The practice thus contributes towards a more just society.

*Tenths of time*

The second example of a symbolic-expressive action frame is the practice of giving 'tenths of time'. It's purpose is outer-directed, as expressed in a quote from the booklet *18 Small Steps towards Change:*

> I do not wish to participate in the 'illness of haste', where the 'patient' always thinks he/she is in a hurry. I do not wish to say that I do not have time. Everyone has the same amount of time available: twenty-four hours per day...During those twenty-four hours I wish to make time for the other. (B15, p.4)

> For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.
> (The Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Ecclesiastes 3:1).

The Christian practice of tithing, giving one-tenth of one's income to the church or other causes, is well-known. Giving one-tenth of one's time is an elaboration on this theme. The LMC publication *Tenths of Time* (B7) relates that the notion was first used in 1987 by the Schweizerische Evangelische Synod, a Calvinist church renewal movement based in Switzerland. Their goals and ideology were very similar to the LMC. The LMC maintained relations with this movement in its time of incorporation. The Swiss movement set itself a time-limit of five years to spread its message and voluntarily suspended activities after that period.

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[19] Mammon: the God of Money. "Wealth regarded as idol or evil influence" (Oxford Dictionary, 1964 edition).

Time is a gift from God, a talent, and as such is subject to spiritual claims and to claims by one's fellow creatures. Time must be set in just relation - no one thing may ever demand all of one's time. The meaning of tenths of time set aside for others and for service is social and diaconial: social in its original meaning of *socius*, which is defined as *sharer*, or *partner;* diaconial in its original meaning of *diakonia,* which is *service* (p.4). "Such a spiritual way of relating to everything (including time), has clear features of the Kingdom of God and his justice: the fellow creature is involved in our relationship with God....(By giving tenths of our time) we structure something of our dedication to the Lord and his justice for the people and the nations" (p. 4,5,9).

An article by Dutch sociologist H. Tieleman, in Bulletin Nr. 070 (p.7-10), discusses time in terms of consumption. Tieleman argues that consumption requires time. Consumption, now that homes are full of 'things', is becoming more focused on the consumption of experience(s). An example is travel, which is industrially produced (the package tour) and consumed as a service. Tieleman argues that in the middle-ages the spatial horizon of people was limited to their relatively immediate surroundings. On the other hand, time perspectives were very broad and included, in fact, eternity. Decisions in daily life were measured against a religious dimension which included eternal values and eternal consequences. Modern people have a global spatial horizon. But the time horizon of modern human beings is very limited: the next vacation, the next election maybe. The next important time occurrence is January 1, 2000: will the computers work, the bank machines, the electricity? "How many of us regularly question the effects of our actions on the next generation, or the third or fourth generation after us, let alone the seventh generation as was customary in some native american cultures?" (p.9). Tieleman concludes that if politicians and other leaders only mind the shop short-term, then the task of reflection on the long-term must be taken up by others, which requires time.

These two expressive dimensions of action, keeping the Wednesday and tenths of time, may be seen as ways to organize experience for the group, and to motivate action. The impact of the symbolic expressions mostly will have internal meaning. Its impact on the wider society or the political arena is restrained by its cognitive context. Moreover, "control (of such symbolic expression) is tenuous and rival interpretations easily arise" (Williams, 1995:127). Simplicity without a definition is a tenuous concept; tenths of time without definition is equally tenuous. The culture-making processes inherent in these symbolic expressions of action may be seen as an "organizational form...(which) at least partly embodies the goals of the group" (Williams, 1995:128). The movement's internal agenda is justified by relating the action dimensions to the ideal society envisioned by the notion of the kingdom.

### *Images of the kingdom*

An important question is how pre-existing codes and symbols are appropriated, communicated, applied, transformed and given meaning (Hart, 1996). An example from LMC literature illustrates how the vision of the 'Kingdom of Heaven on Earth' is appropriated, transformed and given meaning in a contemporary context:

(The Kingdom is not) the new streetplan of the holy city with the twelve gates. Not even the blueprint of it. We remain in the traffic of our own societies. But in that hurrying-along, no-holds-barred traffic chaos, we attempt to build bicycle paths, pedestrian crossings and tunnels under the road... For the social and international problems of which the weak usually become the victims, our aim will be to choose other goals and solutions - even if only on a small-scale - than the usual, which are mostly determined by power-thinking, self-interest and material motives. (B17, p.16)

The quote above sets kingdom rhetoric within a contemporary metaphor, especially salient in the Netherlands. Traffic congestion is high on the list of contemporary environmental problems and often a subject of discussion. The images of bicycle paths and pedestrian crossings focus on the small scale needs of people rather than cars, humans rather than material objects. "To give shape to a new earth, I fear, is far beyond our human powers. But we are called, in any case, to a better earth than we see around us now" (Bakker, 1990:63).

The idea of the kingdom is translated to relate to modern societies in many different ways. The following examples of how this is done are taken from various issues of 'The Bulletin'. An explanation of the kingdom "where justice and mercy are present" (Nr. 00, p.8), includes the statement that societal organization and structures are 'the king'. In order for justice and mercy to be implemented, these qualities must become part of all social structures.

I am convinced that every person knows that too many things are wrong in this world. But he does not allow the inner conversation, the consciousness-raising that is necessary. For that we need the mystical realm. The danger is that we do not address the whole being, that we only look at the individual realm and not the social. A.W. Kist (I 4)

"The social-economic crisis is the unavoidable result of a much deeper spiritual crisis....(We see) horizontal approaches without transcendental notions...Materialism and hedonism have crowded out higher values" (Nr. 050, p.12). For this reason the "healing powers of the kingdom need to be applied to economics - justice needs to be first" (Nr. 00, p.10). The kingdom is "a different type of globalization, one that includes a citizenry which is focused on the well-being of humanity and on peace. It is not reductionistic (or economistic), but allows for the self-realization of all of humanity" (Nr. 070, p.12). Therefore, "obedience to the kingdom is to struggle against national and international processes of injustice" (Nr. 00, p.15).

"The surprising thing is that in their interpretation and preaching over the years most churches today have stripped the full and fundamental sense of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' message of practically all its economic and political content" (Duchrow, 1995:180). LMC visions of the kingdom place the economic and political content front and centre in its discussions. Kingdom rhetoric thus provides a set of symbols, applied to the current culture, which evoke images of change (McGuire, 1992), especially changes to capitalist culture.

### *Other religious rhetorical strategies*

The kingdom of heaven on earth is not the only rhetorical strategy used in LMC literature. Many other Judeo-Christian themes are enlisted to elaborate the ideology of the movement.

You begin building a new lifestyle, which includes engagement and excludes individualism; you begin reading the Bible again to discover that the Word is only true if it is acted upon; you begin to experience that people have exited Egypt before; and who knows: maybe the old church will get a new face, searching for justice. (B 6, p.3)

An especially strong motive for the production of identification with the movement and solidarity is an identification with the biblical people of Israel. The members of the LMC see themselves as 'strangers in the land', just as the Israelites at one time were strangers in the land of Egypt. There is a need to be separate, different and to have a critical attitude towards the culture one lives in. And just as the people of Israel were freed from slavery and left to go to the promised land, the LMC sees its movement as a way to lead the current culture to a new society (B4).

Another concept occasionally referred to is the idea of prophecy:

The prophetic content of the gospel always speaks of a renewal of the faith.
Hans Bakker (I 6)

> Written history tells us that prophets and spiritual counselors often perform poorly when meddling in short-term politics...But written history tells us about real catastrophes when kings and presidents are deaf to spiritual guidance for the longer turn. (van Klinken, 1991:76)

The people of Israel were set apart and called to be different. For that reason they could not adapt to the lifestyles of the tribes in surrounding countries, or adopt the worship of their gods or their idols. Prophets were the ones who called them back when they strayed. The LMC fulfills the prophetic function of calling Christians back from the worship of idols. Idols of our time are the dominance of the economy; the faith in the free market; work as a privilege rather than a universal right; naked egoism; and the sacrifices of humans and natural resources to economic interests (B4). In the words of Max Weber:

"For the substance of the prophecy...is to direct a way of life to the pursuit of a sacred value" (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1946:327). Religion thus points to a substantive rationality: "The choice of ends under a criterion of ultimate values" (Wallerstein, 1998b:3).

### *Secular rhetorical frames: LMC members and WWII*

Although the LMC primarily draws its motivation and rhetorical frames from religious sources, these are not the only ones. I would be amiss, were I not to mention the salience of the experience of the second World War.

Ninety-nine out of every hundred people drop out because of the complexity of the problems. But we have learned during the war that you need courage and staying-power. Hitler's Germany was such a perfect machine, nothing could be done against it. But we learned that you should not succumb to this thinking.

In order to really know something you have to live it, see it, it has to personally affect you. That way it will be recorded in your consciousness forever.

A. W. Kist (I 4)

> Getting more and more possessions has made us subjects of an empire of ever nicer and expensive things. In that sense we live under a type of occupation. The occupying powers have a solid grip on us. (Bakker, 1990:62)

The above quote is from a book, written by an LMC member, titled: *Awake in Occupied Territory: Forty years after the forties.* The subject matter is the need for a renewal of society and alternatives to capitalist, consumer culture. The current culture is thus related to an occupying force.

As related to me in conversation by a number of members, the lived experience of the war years is a significant memory of a time when dreams of a better future were an important feature of life. "Bound together by the fate of the war and destruction, 1945 saw a collective effort to, for once and for all, build a better world" (van Dieren, 1998:53). Consider also the following quote:

> I am a child of the occupation. Three of my best friends were executed, half of my group was jailed, which gave me a completely different worldview. After the war we knew we had to strive for a completely different society, a different way of believing and being church. After the war, after five years of rebuilding, it became clear that all the movements for renewal that had formed during the war, were completely without a chance.
> A.W. Kist (I 4)

Sprinkled throughout LMC literature are references to the war experience. The LMC in several publications refers to itself as a 'resistance' group (e.g. B6, p. 2). One of its brochures makes the following statement: "The majority of humanity is affected by hunger, disease and poverty...Our earth is threatened by disaster and nuclear self-destruction...The scary facts are well-known. We do not have to repeat them. No one can ever say: 'Ich habe ess nicht gewust'" (B6, p.2). The German expression for 'I did not know' is a reference to the statements made by many war criminals following WWII.

Disseminating knowledge, education and awareness is one of the main strategies by which the LMC hopes to form pockets of resistance to the current culture. The dream of a different future is kept alive.

*Rhetorics, religion and politics*

The religious rhetorical strategies described above are useful for internal identification, but perhaps not so useful as external strategies, except for those who understand the discourse. There may be exceptions to this, as illustrated in the following quote, but generally religious rhetoric resonates in 'insiders' circles.

A biblical approach concerns yourself. You can only discuss matters with other people from your own point of view. If they have a different worldview, then the label 'biblical' is not an argument. However, the 'Jubilee 2000' action[20] is gaining recognition globally. So it seems to depend on how you sell your worldview. (Q 5)

"Symbols that have only internal meaning for a movement will have little impact on the political arena" (Williams, 1995: 127). The first focus of the LMC therefore is the churches: concepts such as justice, wholeness, sacrifice and being a stranger in the land resonate there. However, the LMC has failed to make significant inroads in the churches and lacks access to the religious power structures. They continue to operate on the margins of the institutional churches as expressed by Daan van Heere, who works for the section "Church and Environment" of the Dutch Council of Churches:

> The LMC originally was a good idea. It was picked up by critical groups within the churches. Their thinking is good, but they operate at the margins of the institutionalized church. It is difficult to gain entry into the official structures and policies of the churches. The churches and church policies are increasingly focused inward. (I 5)

An ex-member of the steering committee of the LMC (the WOD) also does not believe that targeting the churches is an effective strategy: "I don't think you should keep focusing on the churches. They are unmoveable, so don't waste your energy there" (I 8). The LMC's existence on the margins of the institutional churches, I would suggest, is explained by three factors: first, the LMC's radical message of change is just as scary to the faith community as it is to the larger society, both of which would prefer predictability to the unknown; second, the churches are increasingly focused inward and first and foremost concerned with the general secularization of society and the consequent loss of membership for the churches; and third, the historical tension of the church between its task of concerning itself with matters of the spiritual outside of the immediate experience of the world and its uneasy existence within the material world. It is this last factor that contributed to the closing of the World Council of Churches' Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation initiative after only three years.

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[20] The Jubilee 2000 action is a global movement which pleads for the cancellation of Third World debt by the year 2000. It is based on the biblical notion of a year of jubilee, which was to occur every fifty years, in which all

And yet, others see the churches as potential and important partners. The environmental organization 'Milieudefensie' (associated with Friends of the Earth International) has maintained contacts with the institutional churches for a number of years. "The churches still represent the social middle" (I 2) and Milieudefensie builds alliances with the churches for common action.

> Milieudefensie is the only large environmental organization that profiles itself actively within church circles. The project 'Church Work' asks churches to pay attention to the environment and points out possibilities to local groups of the support activities Milieudefensie can offer them...Current cooperation with the Catholic development organization Bilance, is mainly made possible by the good contacts Milieudefensie has built with church organizations over the years. (Milieudefensie, 1998:22)

The churches have networks of related movements, resources and followers which may potentially be mobilized. Milieudefensie has begun building such possibilities of mobilization.

Does it still make sense to claim a religious role and identification as a mode of individual and collective action in the Dutch culture? As discussed in Chapter three, Dutch society has become increasingly secularized and has become more pluralistic. Moreover, moral conscience is generally a matter of private-sphere activities (McGuire,

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property would be restored to its original owners and all debts were to be canceled.

1992). LMC members express a tolerant and open attitude when questioned about the appropriateness of defining desired social change, in a pluralistic society, in terms of a western Christian belief system:

| *Selected responses* | |
|---|---|
| We won't be able to accomplish anything with our western Christian vision if we do not lose our western attitude of superiority first. | (Q 4) |
| You always express your own norms and values, also those that are based on a certain faith. That does not mean that you judge others who have a different faith. | (Q 8) |
| All major religions have components dealing with honouring creation. These should be a basis for joint action. | (Q 12) |
| Ethical guidelines still make sense. | (Q 13) |
| My personal approach is based on biblical guidelines. I don't know if I would try to act differently otherwise. | (Q 3) |

Despite the middle part of name of the LMC (Missionary), I have found no evidence that conversion to Christian religion is a major purpose of the movement. Perhaps a conversion to the social justice dimension is implied. The quotes above, I believe, support this conclusion.

Increasing secularization and the consequent decline of the traditional Christian parties in politics in the Netherlands (see discussion Chapter three), also closes off political avenues of influence for the LMC. But even among the faithful, there is a certain skepticism about Christian politics:

| *Selected responses* | |
|---|---|
| I agree with being a Christian in politics. But I don't agree with Christian political parties. They can never implement what they represent. | Co Baart (I 8) |
| Politics is rather theoretical. We need to be pragmatic. | (Q 2) |

Our Christian political parties have a strongly conservative and conserving character. As such they are not suited to radical renewal in society. A.W. Kist (I 4)

I think it is better not to use the word 'Christian' in politics...it promises things it cannot deliver. Joop Jansen (I 9)

Christian political parties do not have a monopoly on being socially just. (Q 10)

LMC members, for the most part traditional middle- and upper-middle class members of society, used to find representation within the traditional 'pillars', the political and social interest groups. The above quotes indicate a certain disillusionment with traditional Christian politics. Increasingly, involved citizens group themselves according to their ultimate goals and support those who would seem best situated to support them. In Dutch society, goals have become more important than roots.

### *The churches and protest*

What role do the organized churches and institutions still play in secularizing societies? Van der Sar questions the scientific stance of neutrality and the neglect of questions regarding religious motivations:

If you look at sociological research you find that most people do not indicate that they do, or do not do, certain things because of their faith. It is of course possible that this is a research problem and that researchers don't ask about this kind of motivation. I believe that I express values in the choices I make. Neutrality is a dominating culture, which is nothing but a low level of consciousness, or subjection to the prevailing norms and values. Jaap van der Sar (I 1)

> Religion has always had a revolutionary element; most religions began as a rebellion against one or another established order. Christianity began as a Jewish protest against behaviors and beliefs that the protesters felt were violations of God's word. The gospels of the New Testament are clearly revolutionary in intent...while the Old Testament documents the struggles of people against what they believe is illegitimate authority. (Robbins, 1999:370)

Robbins (1999) argues that virtually all religious movements of the past two hundred years have been "reactions to a single phenomenon - the development and expansion of industrial or consumer capitalism"[21] (p. 371). Robbins understands these reactions as antisystemic challenges to the capitalist world system. Buechler(1995) argues that for many social movements the critique of growth is a central ideological value (p. 446). "At some point, globalization sets in motion the dynamic for a search for ultimate meaning, values and resacralization" (Shupe and Hadden, 1988:xi). While religious reactions may span a broad range of directions and degrees, generally the reactions will take either a conservative (such as fundamentalism), or progressive direction. The LMC is such a progressive reaction.

The LMC leaders and members do not agree with the view that social, economic and political matters are not also spiritual matters. They argue that all of life is spiritual, that faith not reflected in action is dead. The lifeworld thus is intricately bound to the political and economic system:

> We have to show that faith causes changes in life. Make it visible. We need to resist injustice.
> Joop Jansen (I 9)

The unjust social, economic and political system they protest against is capitalism. Their solution is to replace the capitalist system with a new system based on the principles of justice, peace and the integrity of creation - principles which are features of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Replacing the system is not a violent revolutionary activity, or withdrawal from the system. Rather, the new system is to come about through voluntary change. This transformative approach is present, for example, in liberation theology, which holds that spiritual salvation and economic justice are not incompatible, but rather that they are inextricably linked. Brazil is an example of a country where the interrelation of religion and social change had an appreciable effect on the direction of social development[22].

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[21] To illustrate Robbins describes the native North American Ghost Dance, the Cargo Cults of Melanesia and New Guinea, South African Zionism, Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and Protestant Fundamentalism in the

The LMC is not unique in its beliefs. Other movements may be examined to illustrate reactions in different time periods and in different places. The following is by no means an exhaustive or complete inventarisation of religious thinking and action addressing problems of capitalism. The selected examples indicate the role of churches and Christian movements challenging the capitalist system, with a focus on similarities to the LMC and acts of simplicity as a response to injustice.

### *The Social Gospel in America*

I selected the Social Gospel movement as a movement with many similarities to the LMC: its analysis of society, causes of problems and solutions are strikingly similar. Although the Social Gospel movement is from a different era, a century ago, and played a much larger role in politics and society than the LMC, it is a profound commentary on social powerlessness that the problems are still very much the same today as they were then.

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United States.

[22] Many more instances of the teachings on social justice of the Roman Catholic Church may be found, although it is well-known that the official institutions of the church often opposed liberation theology. The discussion which follows focuses mainly on the Protestant churches, which is not to say that the Catholic church or other religions do not have their particular groups which are concerned with the same problems. For examples of the social teachings of the Canadian Roman Catholic church, see Sheridan (1987). For a Roman Catholic discussion of new lifestyles as resistance to the consumer culture, see Kavanaugh (1982).

The Social Gospel was a social movement in both the United States and Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It arose as a response to increasing industrialization and urbanization. In Canada, the changes in society also included a large increase in its population, due to immigration. "Between 1880 and 1910 the total population of the nation increased an impressive 32 per cent" (Clark, Grayson and Grayson 1975:39). At the core of the Social Gospel was a crusade for justice and righteousness. The Social Gospel was essentially a social movement, although the patterns of thought and action present in the movement were long a part of North American Protestantism. The movement was also influenced by Christian socialism in Great Britain and Germany. The Social Gospel saw in socialism an ideology which was not hostile, but akin to its own ideas (Barker, 1919; Allen, 1975; Clark, Grayson and Grayson, 1975; White and Hopkins, 1976; Keshen, 1997).

The Social Gospel's ideal society was the kingdom of heaven on earth. "(Christianity's) purpose for its followers is not to get to heaven, but to bring heaven down to earth" (Charles Stelzle in a speech to the American Labour Foundation in 1905, quoted in White and Hopkins, 1976:67). John Barker (1919) speaks of "a new social order in which God is consciously present in the common life of men as a ruling and inspiring power" (p. 1). Richard Allen (1975) discussing the Canadian Social Gospel points to the idea that Christianity is essentially a social religion "concerned, when the misunderstanding of the ages was stripped away, with the quality of human relations on this earth".

The human relations in question had much to do with the dominance of capitalism, competition and individualism. J.M. Ludlow, editor of *The Christian Socialist,* predates the LMC by about ninety years, but parallels its analysis of society:

> That if the Gospel speaks true, and 'ye cannot serve God and Mammon', it is wholly incompatible with a political economy which proclaims self-interest to be the very pivot of social action;...but that it is compatible with those theories or systems which have for a common object to bind up into fellowship and not to divide by selfishness and rivalry; to substitute fair prices and living wages for a false cheapness, and starvation, its child. (Quoted in White and Hopkins, 1976:28)

The distribution and redistribution of wealth was a common theme with Social Gospellers also. William J. Tucker, editor of the *Andover Review,* comments in an editorial in 1891 on wealth:

> The most striking, and in many ways the most startling, feature of the economic situation is, not that the poor are growing poorer, ... but that the rich are becoming so very rich....What the ethical question of tomorrow in the economic world may be I know not. But the ethical question of to-day centres, I am sure, in the distribution rather than in the redistribution of wealth. (Quoted in White and Hopkins, 1976:34,35)

Simple living, in the view of the Social Gospel movement was not just "a therapeutic balm, but a means of provoking meaningful social change" (Shi, 1988:177). American president Woodrow Wilson spoke of a societal standard of "self-sacrifice and self-abnegation" (White and Hopkins, 1975:186). John Barker (1919) argued that "the church may contribute to the abolition of poverty by stimulating the habit of thrift" (p.88). A leading spokesman for the Social Gospel, the Reverend Washington Gladden, preached about the consequences, both to the spender and to society, of not earning and spending money carefully. "Self-indulgence and waste, regardless of their larger economic effects, were dangerous practices for any true Christian" (Shi, 1988:177).

Concern with environmental problems at the turn of the century, was expressed in the conservation movement and the movement to set aside land for national parks. It is interesting to note the following prayer from *For God and the People*, a booklet of prayers for the social awakening, written by Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the leaders of the Social Gospel movement:

> When our use of this world is over and we make room for others, may we not leave anything ravished by our greed or spoiled by our ignorance, but may we hand in our common heritage fairer and sweeter through our use of it, undiminished in fertility and joy, so that our bodies may return in peace to the great mother who nourished them and our spirits may round the circle of a perfect life in thee. (Quoted in White and Hopkins, 1976:160)

The Social Gospel movement declined in the 1920s in a surge of crass materialism following the First World War and the theological critique of neo-orthodoxy. White and Hopkins argue that the ideals of the Social Gospel re-emerged in the 1960s, as a not always recognized root of the social justice movement. The formation of Evangelicals for Social Action, in 1963 and the Chicago Declaration containing their ideas, reach back to the Social Gospel era: "Before God and a billion hungry neighbors, we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote more just acquisitions and distribution of the world's resources" (Quoted in White and Hopkins, 1976:280). John C. Bennett (1976) proposes that the concerns of the Social Gospel became institutionalized in the World Council of Churches and other international ecumenical institutions.

### *The New Lifestyle movements*

The new lifestyle movement was an important forerunner of the LMC. The initiative of the World Council of Churches was not only followed in the Netherlands.The discussion of the response in the United States is included here as an example of the influence of a different context and place on the formation of a response to a set of problems.

> I talked to American colleagues during that time (of the new lifestyles process) and they almost always translated the idea of new lifestyle to communes, groups that lived outside of society, almost autarchic organisations. And they felt the need to play a role in the society much less than we did. The new lifestyle assumed a different form there. I don't think that is the most creative form, to withdraw from society. You become a bit like a zoo. People go take a look at it and say: 'So, this is how it can be done also'.
> Jaap van der Sar (I 1)

The World Council of Churches initiated its call for a 'new lifestyle' in 1974. This initiative and the Dutch response, is discussed in-depth in Chapter three. The North-American response to the call for a new life-style is worthy of discussion here. The commune option mentioned in the quote above is perhaps a more typical North American response. For the Dutch this would not have been an option. Living outside society in a country as small as the Netherlands is almost impossible. All of the land area is used intensively. North America, however, still has sufficient space for people to 'get away'. One of the clearest expressions perhaps is the 'back-to-the-land movement' of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although this was not a direct result of Christian social teaching, it combines elements from Eastern mysticism, native American religions, and traditional Christianity. This combination of values endows it with a quasi-religious motivation (Brinkerhoff and Jacob, 1987).

More clearly Protestant responses are found in numerous publications of the late 1970s and early 1980s. John V. Taylor (1977), in his book *Enough is enough: A biblical call for moderation in a consumer-oriented society*, proposes a 'theology of enough', which would see the emphasis placed on "not goods, but people" (p.93). Taylor also finds the solution to living a life of moderation in the idea of the commune.

A response of the Episcopal Church in America is contained in a study guide (Crean and Ebbeson, 1981): *Living Simply: an examination of Christian lifestyles.* The 1979 resolution of the sixty-sixth convention of the church, reads in part:

> ...(That) every member of this church exercise a responsible life-style based on real personal needs commensurate with a world of limited resources. (p. vi)

The study guide is a response to that call and places the response in a theological context of stewardship. The responses advocated include appropriate or intermediate technology, communal living, simple living and cooperatives.

Another response dating to 1973 is the 'Shakertown Pledge', which is still in circulation today (Web of Creation webpage at www.webofcreation.org). The pledge was the result of discussions held at a retreat of religious centre directors and staff. They realized that their own lifestyles and overconsumption contribute to the problems of continuing poverty, hunger and environmental deterioration. Christianity, they argued, must play a vital role in the solution to these problems, "particularly Christianity in the radical simplicity that characterized its first centuries" (Corson-Finnerty, 1977:xii). This radical simplicity is not a condition of 'holy poverty', but rather it involves taking the time to consider what is really important in life. Therefore, part 3 of the pledge reads: "I commit myself to lead a life of creative simplicity and to share my wealth with the world's poor" (p.97). Religious language is purposely avoided in the language of the pledge and the discussion, in order to make the ideas more accessible to a wider audience. The vision of the new society, therefore, is expressed as "a society in right relation to global realities" (p. 125). The lifestyle of radical simplicity in this response is meant to be lived within society, rather than a withdrawal from society.

### *Kairos Europe*

Kairos Europe is a current movement set in the wider context of Europe. It arose some years after the formation of the LMC, but is very similar in its analysis of social conditions and the requirements for social change. It appears to have gained a much greater response than the LMC. My study of Kairos is limited to an examination of its discussion paper, a book by one of its founders (Ulrich Duchrow) and attendance at one of their meetings. I can therefore not make any definite statement on the reason for their success, nor on the nature of their success. One of the contributing factors worthy of mention is that Kairos has been successful in building alliances with labour unions and self-help organizations, which probably contributes to their strength.

Kairos Europe is a network of self-help organisations, labour unions, church groups and solidarity groups. It attempts to build coalitions with many different groups in order to challenge the dominance of the neo-liberal, deregulated, globalized economy. Kairos has broad support throughout Europe in Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, France, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland and Belgium.

Kairos has published a first draft of the *European Kairos Document: For a socially just, life-sustaining and democratic Europe* (1998). It builds on other Kairos Documents: first, the African document, published in 1985 by Christians involved in the liberation struggle, which challenged apartheid policies. Second, the Central American Kairos document, published in 1988, calling for a renunciation of colonialism and imperialism. Again, the main thrust came from Christians, this time from the Philippines, South Korea, Namibia, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

'Kairos' is understood as the Greek word used in the Bible to mean "opportunity for repentance and a change of heart, opportunity for change and for decisive action with the oppressed in a time of crisis or at the moment of truth" (European Kairos Document, 1998:1). Kairos Europe grew out of the First European Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, held in Basel in 1989. Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) was an initiative of the World Council of Churches (see Chapter three). Kairos took the initiative as a grassroots action group, in order to put the ideals of JPIC into concrete terms. The Kairos Europe document is still in development. The initial draft, composed by four international teams, is distributed among many interested groups throughout Europe. Mobile teams also held seminars in Brazil, the Caribbean, Germany, Poland, Switzerland and Italy, in 1994. "Their experiences were collated at an evaluation conference in Brussels in June of 1994...under the motto 'Save Planet and People - Control Money'" (Duchrow, 1995:309). Their conclusions were presented to a public hearing with representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Responses to the initial draft of the document will be collected by June 1999 and then be published. A grassroots meeting is planned for October 1999 in Brussels, where the demands of the group will be presented to the European Parliament. Various other activities are planned also.

The following description and quotes are from the Kairos Document, 1998. The Kairos movement addresses a range of broad problems, globally, but with a focus on the European situation. In this respect, a specific focus is on central and eastern European countries. "The intrusion of world market forces into these countries has virtually denied them any possibility for social and economic self-determination" (p.6). Another focus is the creation of the European single market, which, according to Kairos, has resulted in a situation which "forces the same structural adjustment programmes as the IMF dictates to the over indebted countries of the South and East" (p.7) onto European countries. Although the document lacks a solid analysis of power in the current system and uses too many slogans, it proposes clear alternatives[23].

Kairos Europe sees a special role for the churches - "after all, they should be the first to be judged according to the criterion of *lived* social alternatives" (Duchrow, 1995:213; emphasis added) - although it also acknowledges the Christian churches' compliance with the capitalist system. "So we have the situation that in the capitalist system both the dominators and the dominated appeal to the Bible and theology, the one for legitimation of the status quo, and the other for the sake of protest and resistance to it" (Duchrow, 1995:125).

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[23] My own critique, which was confirmed by Dutch economist Aart van den Berg, at a Kairos meeting I attended. A more detailed analysis of the capitalist system and proposed alternatives is contained in the work of Ulrich Duchrow (1995), one of the founders of Kairos Europa.

The alternatives Kairos Europe proposes are focused on small-scale local alternatives, LETS (Local Exchange and Trade Systems) and alternative consumption. The power of every individual lies in the areas of money and consumption. According to Duchrow, the problem is that "we are not just dealing with normal desires, but with a serious problem of addiction, made worse by the huge amounts spent on advertising each day" (p. 269). Restraint of consumption is necessary, however, because current consumption is environmentally unsustainable, and does not take account of the unfulfilled needs of the poor. "What remains unclear, however, is how to initiate self-restraint on the part of the population" (Duchrow, 1995:269). Earlier this year, Kairos Europe officially invited the LMC to join their coalition: an option the LMC is considering.

*Religion as a challenge to the dominant paradigm*

The LMC's basic conception of the gospel, is as a revolutionary and critical message, as evidenced by the following:

I think that the gospel has always functioned as a counter-movement...counter, because the church always remains critical. (Bulletin Nr. 069, p. 7)

> The Ecumenical Movement itself is a global one and has its biblical roots - in spite of frequent distortions - in a universalist understanding of God, humankind and nature....The search for social justice and the issue of just stewardship have been the focus of ecumenical social ethics....Today it is our task in the Ecumenical Movement to coordinate and intensify our activities as a counter-force to the prevailing unjust developments. (Kairos letter, p. 1,5,6)

The LMC shares a number of features in common with the movements described in the preceding sections:

1) They are religious in character.

2) They react to the development and expansion of the dominance of economic and financial matters. At their core they critique the central ideological value of continued economic growth and its attendant requirement for ever increasing consumption. They are concerned with issues of social justice and material inequalities, increasingly on a global scale.

3) Each attempts to reach its goals by socially approved means, whether by withdrawal from society, by living an alternative, simple, lifestyle within society, by socio-political actions, or a combination of these means.

4) All hold out the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth as the ideal, or 'good', society.

As such, the LMC may be understood as part of a continuing Christian religious tradition which constitutes a systemic challenge to the dominant capitalist system.

The strength of religious involvement appears to be as a source of motivation, and the ethical insights religion brings to bear on certain problems. Institutional structures such as religious organizations can have an influence on structures of thought and behaviour. If they choose to take up the challenge, they can therefore play a large role in promoting policies of self-limitation. They have the ability to influence individual behaviour, but also retain a large enough influence to, at the very least, influence debate and discussion in their own spheres and in the wider society.

Although the churches do not always offer specific solutions to problems, they do have networks of related institutions on which to call. This is especially the case in the ecumenical movement, most strongly represented by the World Council of Churches. However,

> given the ambiguity and complexity of so many moral challenges, it is not to be expected that all members of a particular church, or all church organizations in a particular region, will arrive at the same moral decision in each particular situation. Christian freedom encompasses sincere and serious differences of moral judgment. (Best and Granberg-Michaelson, 1993:87)

The examples of Islamic and Protestant fundamentalism (discussed in Robbins, 1999 and Fields, 1991) illustrate examples of religious reactions to issues of private morality, rather than public morality. These movements tend to have a conservative, or conserving character and tend to advocate the preservation of 'traditional' families, 'traditional' roles of women, and defend against the extension of rights to previously oppressed groups such as homosexuals. But when religion reacts to issues of public morality, such as hunger and underdevelopment it tends to qualify as a challenge to the dominant paradigm.

# CHAPTER 6

## Voluntary simplicity: 'less but better'

> The innovations that we start and that then roll over us like an alien power all take place while we pursue something else. We stand the world on its head, we tip nature over, we drain the lifeblood from traditions, and all the while we are concerned with something else, something simple and comprehensible. (Beck, 1995:37)

In the case of the LMC the "something simple and comprehensible" is human suffering. It would be a mistake to see the LMC as simply a religious movement, concerned with issues of religious content only. Rather, it is concerned with issues which would normally not be considered the terrain of religion at all. ('Normally', that is, in modern societies where the separation of church and state is a fiercely adhered to doctrine). The LMC shows deep concern for human suffering, inequality, poverty, environmental degradation and violence in all its many forms. In this respect they join many other global movements for change, who are not in the first place concerned with economic self-interest. Rather, they oppose economic self-interest, in solidarity with others and the earth on which we all depend for our survival.

To re-cap the seven main areas of concern of the LMC, elaborated in Chapter four: 1) the free market economy; 2) dominance of science and rationality; 3) unemployment and underemployment; 4) hunger and poverty; 5) environmental degradation; 6) inequality of males and females; and 7) the nuclear arms race and the military-industrial complex. In this respect, the movement is informed by values which are grounded in the perception of global problems that affect all of humanity and its future. The UN World Commission on Environment and Development vindicates this view, by stating that the most serious environmental problem of our time is world poverty and the unjust distribution of wealth (Seabrook, 1993:200).

These problems are complex, non-transparent and interconnected. Solutions are not simple.

> What permits so much injustice and cruelty in the world to go unchallenged is the license it gains from people's *unknowing*, the inability to connect what we do, the way we live, with the consequences for distant, unseen others. (Seabrook, 1993:193)

Yet, citizens in many places *do* see, *do* connect, *do* know and attempt to contribute to solutions in their own small ways. It is the outcome of that simple question that comes from awareness: "But what can *I* do?". Although we may agree, for example, that the practices and policies of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund need to be radically reformed, most of us do not have the option to be heard, or the power to effect, such a change. How then do citizens respond and react to complex issues and what positive and active responses do they bring to the dilemmas of our time?

> Ideas in the abstract are inert; they tell us little about the mystery of daily living. To bring texture - indeed, to bring life to the study of cultural beliefs - requires going beyond symbolic analysis; it entails examining how people have struggled to translate myths into practice. (Shi, 1988:7)

Struggles to translate myths, or ideals, into practice are responses to dilemmas of living in a complex society. A more detailed examination and discussion of voluntary simplicity, as practised both in North America and by members of the LMC, will provide a picture of these struggles. It may help to understand the challenges, the significance of its response to the problems and the likelihood of a wider acceptance of the practice.

"The key to the problem is: too many, consuming too much and in the wrong place. The key to the solution, therefore, also is people" (Winsemius, 1995:69). The practice of voluntary simplicity, voluntary restraint of consumption and the use of resources, begins to work on the solution. But why should anyone do this voluntarily? It certainly goes against the grain of utilitarianism.

### *Less and the puzzle of prosperity and piety*

Historically, the ideal of living the simple life is part of the teachings of most of the major religions and exists outside the framework of religious beliefs as a moral and ethical ideal. "The great spiritual teachers of the East - Zarathustra, Buddha, Lao-Tse and Confucius - all stressed that material self-control was essential to the good life" (Shi, 1988:4).

According to Shi, in a study tracing the history of simplicity in American society, "the simple life represents an approach to living that self-consciously subordinates the material to the ideal" (p.4). Often the ideal was of a religious nature. Calvinist frugality and restraint are probably best known from Weber's work on the Protestant ethic. But: "Weber himself was careful to point out that Reformed theology frequently acted as a restraining influence on economic behaviour" (p. 10). Such was the logical dilemma in the Protestant ethic: "How to limit social ambition without stifling economic enterprise?" (p. 16). Calvin explicitly denied any correlation between material success and personal salvation. The value of work was to be found in its spiritual, moral and social aspects, not in its material rewards as such. Moderation and spiritual devotion were the key elements in a life of "prudent sufficiency" (p. 11). Moreover, "riches are a means to help the needy.

That is the way to proceed and keep a happy medium" ( John Calvin, quoted in Shi, 1988:11). Despite Calvin's injunctions, for Calvinists and Puritans alike it was difficult to solve the "puzzle of prosperity and piety" (p. 16).

This puzzle remained throughout the centuries for Calvinists, Puritans, Quakers, Republicans and Romantics alike. Piety was thrown to the winds, however, with the rise of the consumer society. After the first World War the consumption ethic replaced the production ethic of the nineteenth century, while at the same time increases in productive efficiency provided more consumer goods. The idea now became that "national prosperity is increased by liberal spending" (p. 216). The depression called this doctrine into question, and during the second World War simple living and thrift once again became public virtues. But once again, simplicity disappeared after the war and consumers, expressing the demand pent-up during the depression and war years, went on a frenzied buying spree. The post-war years increasingly saw the "sanctification of undiscriminating consumerism as a societal virtue" (p. 250). The next wave of simple living occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when the counterculture practiced a version of simplicity based on oriental mysticism. Ecological concerns began playing a role in the early 1970s and were reinforced by the Arab oil embargoes of 1973 and 1974.

Simplicity often reappeared on a wave of nostalgic longing for a simpler time. But it also remains, what Shi calls "a spiritual ethic of conscience" (p. 278). It has a deep spiritual appeal, and elevates human aspirations beyond the material and mundane. Shi concludes: "That the simple life has survived in such various forms testifies to the continuing attraction of its basic premise. It *can* be a good life. And it is this factor above all that explains its durability" (p. 279).

For LMC members, despite the difficulty of standing outside the mainstream, the rewards are in the ability to connect beliefs and values with the practice of everyday life. Although not always successful, or consequent, they manage to lessen the discrepancies between theory and action. That *too* explains the durability of the ideal. For LMC members, the way they live is a good life, because it brings unity to their values, beliefs and behaviours.

### *Less is better*

Many practitioners of voluntary simplicity in North America see their way of life not as a way of doing with less, but as a way to live a better life. They see it as a way of living with balance, between the extremes of poverty and excess. Table 2 shows the core values of voluntary simplicity, adapted from Shama (1985).

**Table 2**

| |
|---|
| *Material Simplicity* |
| Buying and consuming less; uncluttering and simplifying one's life. |
| *Human Scale* |
| Scaling down or humanizing one's living and working environment. |
| *Appropriate Technology* |
| Technology that is functional, durable, easy to repair, efficient and energy conserving. |
| *Self Determination* |
| Control over one's life and less dependency on other organizations, including experts. |
| *Ecological Awareness* |
| The realization that resources are limited, conservation is needed and pollution reduction is imperative. |
| *Personal Growth* |
| Development of one's inner life. A way of life that is "outwardly simple and inwardly rich". |

As discussed in Chapter two, some futurists see voluntary simplicity as one of the defining and most important trends of the next millennium. A 1991 *Time/CNN* survey in the U.S. on 'the simple life' reported that sixty-nine percent of those surveyed said they would like to "slow down and live a more relaxed life". Sixty-one percent agreed that "earning a living today requires so much effort that it's difficult to find time to enjoy life". Eighty-nine percent said that it was more important to spend time with their families (as reported in Elgin, 1993:44). This outcome shows a cognitive dissonance between the competitive consumption culture, prominent in industrialized countries, and the wished-for lives expressed. Ottman (1995) and Yankelovitch and Lekowitz (1980) report the same perceived discrepancy between values and behaviour. Ottman writes: "Many are ambivalent about how to reconcile their values with present consumption modes...People cannot live for long with a disconnect between their values and behaviour" (p. 12, 14). Research has shown that sympathizers with voluntary simplicity constitute between one-third and one half of the American population (Elgin, 1993; Shama, 1985). For some reason this part of the population has not found a way to act on their values yet.

Elgin's own research shows additional reasons for choosing a life of voluntary simplicity. In addition to the values and reasons given in table 2 and in the paragraph above these are: "to begin to reduce the vast inequities between the rich and the poor around the world"; "to provide one's children with more humane value systems and life experiences"; "to develop the personal skills and know-how to survive a time of severe economic and social disruption"; and to "create the personal circumstances of life in which one's feelings, thoughts, and actions can come into alignment" (1993:70). Summarized, the motivations for choosing voluntary simplicity are the search for balance, self-determination and uniting values and beliefs with action.

Values uniting concern for human suffering and injustice in our economic system with choices made in everyday life are most important for LMC members. In this sense they are more outer-directed than voluntary simplicity practitioners, whose reasons emphasize more so the inner-directedness of personal balance and self-determination.

### *Less is more just*

One of the values voluntary simplicity practitioners attempt to put into action is an attempt to wed social justice with reform environmentalism (Deval, 1995). Van Dam (1977) states that "part of the rationale for voluntary simplicity is involuntary poverty" (p. 224). Burch (1995) calls voluntary simplicity "a powerful antidote to social and economic injustice" (p. 25). Shames (1991) writes that the modern equivalent of abdicating responsibility is "letting the marketplace decide" (p.7). Taking responsibility thus is reclaiming decision-making power.

The marketplace places an emphasis on private consumption, which has led to the neglect of public consumption and that work which promotes the public welfare. An objection frequently made to reduction of consumption is that to do so will cause unemployment. George Bush, at the time president of the United States, announced during the Earth Summit in 1992, that he would not jeopardise jobs or low taxes in his country, in order to lower consumption (Seabrook, 1993:223). However, the connection between lowering of public consumption and employment is not a proven one. The

Scientific Advisory Council to the Government in the Netherlands calculated that a 15% reduction in consumption would lead to higher employment (see discussion in Chapter two). Lowered consumption of energy and environmental goods would allow investment in the labour-intensive care sectors of society, clean-up of the environment, and Third World development. Thus the key to this counter intuitive result was the redirection of the financial space created, to public consumption and the work necessary for justice and environment.

Voluntary simplicity is always a choice. It is a choice made primarily by white, middle-class, well-educated westerners. They have the opportunity to choose, because they are rich in cultural capital and this gives them options, including the option to re-join the consumer society surrounding them. The choice made by those living simple lives is not the modern version of choice which is all about rights and is "an act of will, responsible to nothing beyond itself" (Blanshard, 1967:254). The choice for voluntary simplicity is made precisely because there *is* a responsibility embedded in choices in everyday life. One of the consumption criteria used by the voluntary simplicity movement is: "Do I consider the impact of my consumption patterns on other people and the earth?" (Elgin, 1993:149). One of the tenets of the movement therefore is to attempt to establish compassion as a basis for the organization of human affairs.

The new life-style movement initiated in the 1970s by the World Council of Churches, had at its basis a growing uneasiness over the contrasts between poor and rich, developed and less-developed countries. One of the leading influences on the new life-style movement, Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, articulated the principle that "nobody should increase his affluence until everybody possesses the essentials of life" (quoted in Van Steenbergen and Feller, 1977:289). The same concern for the poor of the earth is a large part of the motivation of the LMC and its members. And the World Council of Churches again emphasized the connections in its Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation initiative of the 1980s. The environmental movements now, too, are finding that environmental change must be connected to the requirements for social justice. Gomes, et.al. (1992), in their report on sustainability in the Netherlands, bring a developing nations' view to this connection: "The problem of waste, viewed in (Dutch government) reports as a question of disposability, should be seen first as the result of hoarding" (p.113). Sustainable development thus requires attention to social justice issues: "Hence, our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice within and amongst nations" (WCED, 1987:49). If sustainable development is good for the poor it must also be good for the rich. A "double standard is ethically not acceptable" (Mies, 1997).

For LMC members a life of voluntary simplicity, therefore, is not only inner-directed with a focus on the benefits of simplifying one's life. It is also to a large extent outer-directed and endows one's own choices with responsibility for others.

### *Less reclaims the lifeworld*

As reported, many in the western, industrialized nations, feel a certain dissonance between their consumption patterns, their working lives and their values. For most "there is a feeling of self-defeating helplessness, avoiding taking any direct responsibility in solving the problem" (Gomes et.al., 1992:125). For many, the dissonance is most strongly felt in the discrepancy between the effort of earning a living and time to enjoy life and family.

Living by the ethical principles of sustainable development, both in its ecological and its social justice implications, also requires practical knowledge of what such a lifestyle means. Durning (1991), argues that precisely this practical knowledge is missing and that voluntary simplicity therefore needs political steps as well. This would require policies of restraint of economic decision-makers and individual consumers. Gorz (1993) argues that such a political approach - "fiscal and monetary hetero-regulation" - wedded to technological determinism, would impose the rule of expertocracy on populations.

> Its pursuit will therefore imply an extension of what Habermas has called the 'colonization of the lifeworld': the utilization of existing individual motivations, by managers of the system, to produce results that do not correspond to any intention on the part of individuals. (p.56, 57)

Gorz would argue that such expertocracies deny individuals the "capacity for judgment and subject them to an 'enlightened' authority claiming to represent the higher interests of a cause beyond their understanding" (p.57). It seems to me that Gorz in this case attributes much power to individual judgment, a capacity which is in line with the market doctrine of individual voluntarism, the individual's power to choose. In doing so, he ignores structural constraints on individual choices, the power of marketing and advertising - those who perform, what Seabrook (1993:193) calls 'purification rituals'- the power of corporations to define needs for individuals and political powers to address individuals as consumers, in the service of economic growth. The complexity of choices further complicates the individual's actions in everyday life and makes them less intuitively intelligible. As Beck (1995) says: "The ecological issue is not merely abstract;

it virtually requires that we ignore our own senses" (p. 12). Social justice issues are similarly opaque to vernacular knowledge.

Gorz (1994, 1993, 1989, 1985) finds the solution to ecological and social justice questions in the establishment of a 'norm of sufficiency'. A norm of sufficiency involves both the self-limitation of needs and of effort given in order to satisfy those needs. The solution thus has two aspects: one, different ways of working; and two, the setting of limits to needs and desires in order to reduce effort. In practice this would mean a "social policy combining reduced working hours with a universal basic income detached from commercial employment" (Strange, 1996:88). Gorz finds historical precedent for such a norm of sufficiency and its accompanying self-limitation, in precapitalist societies. Producers, artisans and craftspeople, organized in guilds, set uniform prices for products of different qualities, free from competition and the free market. They were free, therefore, to determine for themselves the intensity and duration of their labour, or the input of effort. Contractual relations between producers and merchants made it difficult to demand more production and inputs of effort.

> For the worker, Max Weber writes, the opportunity of earning more was less attractive than that of working less. He did not ask: how much can I earn in a day if I do as much work as possible? but: how much must I work in order to earn the wage, 2 1/2 marks, which I earned before and which takes care of my traditional needs? (Quoted in Gorz, 1993:61)

Capital resolved this problem by reserving jobs for those who would work full-time and by granting longer holidays, rather than reduced working hours.

Where Gorz sees the decrease of working time as a solution to overconsumption and unsustainability, my observations in the Netherlands leave me to doubt this outcome.

The workweek in the Netherlands has been reduced to thirty-six hours per week. This means for many people that they work a forty-hour work and have the right to an additional day off every two weeks. Many choose to save this time off and take it as additional vacation time. Simple math will tell us that this means an additional twenty-six working days, or more than five weeks, of vacation time. Most people, at least those with the resources to do so, choose to take extra vacations, often to exotic destinations. This has contributed, in the Netherlands, to a large increase in the number of kilometers traveled by airplane per person. Without any incentives to behave otherwise, more time will not necessarily translate into less consumption or less environmentally destructive behaviour.

How then would society re-establish a norm of sufficiency, without its traditional moorings? According to Gorz, this is a political matter. “Self-limitation is thus shifted from the level of individual choice to the level of a social project. The norm of sufficiency, deprived of its traditional mooring, has to be defined politically” (p.65). Such a reworking of the norm of sufficiency would reclaim the lifeworld from the domination of economic rationality and the subjection of all other forms of rationality to that of the logic of capitalism.

Reclaiming non-economic ends, however, is not only a rational project, no matter which rationality is applied. It has much to do with non-rational aspirations, that what people hope for and dream about. “(B)eing human involves feeling, dreaming, experiencing, remembering and forgetting, and not simply knowing” (Zaretsky, 1995:273). Sometimes hopes and dreams are, what some might call ‘utopian: the

Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Sometimes hopes and dreams are ambiguous: they may involve 'having it all' *and* reducing inputs of efforts, with extra time left over for family and friends. This too is the nature of consumer culture: the myth that we *can* have it all.

*Less for many?*

> It would be hopelessly naive to believe that entire populations will suddenly experience a moral awakening, renouncing greed, envy and avarice. The best that can be hoped for is a gradual widening of the circle of those practicing voluntary simplicity. (Durning, 1991:14)

In the Netherlands, discussions of any policy issue contain a focus on the question of 'draagvlak'. Although the term may be translated simply as 'support', or 'public support', this does not quite do it justice. A more accurate translation would be 'carrying surface'. As the National Commission on Sustainable Development states: "Developments have to be carried by people" (1998:9). To have 'draagvlak' means to have both *passive* and *active* support for a policy or for cultural or social change. The weightier the policy or change is, the broader the surface must be on which it is carried, e.g. the more people it needs to carry or support it. 'Draagvlak' is expressed in opinions, attitudes and behaviour of individuals, groups and institutions. One of the most important components of building 'draagvlak' is the formation of opinions and the participation that flows from formed opinions (p.13).

For many years, polls have shown the environment to be the number one priority for people in the Netherlands. It has translated itself into a willingness to separate garbage into three separate waste streams and to recycle: 95% of Dutch people do so. But it has not translated into a willingness to change consumptive behaviour. A report of the Dutch

Central Plan Bureau (CPB) on sustainability, states: "Every time it is shown that, when the step is made from abstraction to concrete policy, large differences appear behind the agreement on the principles" (1996:15). Consumption continues to rise, private use of automobiles increases steadily, vacations to global destinations by airplane are becoming more popular all the time. This shows that, even if an issue, in this case the environment, has a certain 'draagvlak' in terms of opinions, it does not necessarily express itself in behaviour. *Passive* support is not necessarily translated into *active* support. The only exception where knowledge translates into behaviour is when one's own health or the health of one's family is threatened, illustrated by the perception that genetically-engineered food is unhealthy (NCDO, 1997:211).

One of the reasons most likely is that consumption itself is a complex issue. Hielkema, a Dutch historian, poses that consumption has three aspects: one, instinctive consumption, a biological necessity; two, manipulated consumption, creation of new desires through marketing and advertising; and three, consumption in the service of status and lifestyle, a form of self-expression (Milieudefensie, 1998:13). Mies (1997) argues that a change in consumption patterns will therefore only occur when people begin to "define what constitutes a good life differently from what the managers of the corporations think". Consumer change must be understood not as a loss or an ascetic exercise, but as a liberation (p.12-20).

# CHAPTER 7

## Discussion and conclusions

This qualitative case-study began with the goal of examining an example of lived voluntary simplicity, in order to look at the potential it may have to contribute to a reduction of consumption in western industrialized nations. To do so, I traveled to the Netherlands and studied the beliefs and lifestyles of the members of the Landelijk Missionair Collectief (LMC). What resulted is a narrative describing the movement and an interpretive analysis. The narration is necessarily incomplete: only a small sample of members was interviewed and not all documents could be examined. Furthermore, people interviewed chose to tell me what they decided to disclose in response to particular questions. The interpretive analysis is also a matter of choices made on the part of the researcher.

As such, this thesis is a very personal project as well. My interest in sustainable development and especially the issue of high levels of consumption in the western world guided my inquiry. The connection between consumption questions and issues of social justice, especially for the Third World, and the distribution of environmental costs and benefits, added a further level of interest and inquiry. The issues raised and evidence collected, led me to consider additional questions: the role of alternative visions of the future, the role of religion in defining these visions, and the resources religion may bring to the answers to these questions. We live in a world in which there are constant tensions between economic necessity and moral necessity. We may need to recover a spiritual dimension to resolve these tensions.

As I worked on this project, certain themes and issues became visible through the mass of evidence collected. First, how can self-limitation become a project of social-limitation? This requires a shift in emphasis from the personal to the social and hence, to limits imposed by structures. I have no illusion that I have found an answer to this question, nor did the LMC provide an answer. My contribution is therefore limited to raising questions and attempting to point to some ways of finding answers. The second theme that emerged is the realization that the work of change does not necessarily have immediately visible or measurable results. This work can be better understood as processes, preliminary to future change. This raises the issue of knowledge and how knowledge is used. I believe that the social sciences must become an integral part of a redirection of knowledge and new combinations of knowledge, if societies are to survive and flourish into the future. The third theme I focused on are the preconditions that must exist in order to make future change possible. These preconditions can also be seen as social and cultural conditions for sustainability. The establishment of these conditions will depend on processes of education, knowledge redirection and the examination of experimental forms of social organization and material practice. I discussed these preconditions in-depth in chapter three (pages 19-24).

### *From self-limitation towards a project of self-limitation*

Voluntary simplicity, or self-limitation, is important for its demonstration effect. It demonstrates a lived alternative and a possible way to limit one's demands on the earth. It further demonstrates solidarity with those who do not have access to sufficient resources for life. Voluntary simplicity by itself does not guarantee sustainable development. If sufficient numbers of people participate in changes in the lifeworld and manage to limit the effects of economic and political imperatives on normative questions, substantial shifts in economics and politics could occur. For example, a study in the Netherlands of twelve households living energy-efficient lives, with no reductions in the standard of living, concluded that if all people in the country lived in the same way, CO2 emissions would return to 1990 levels by 2007 (NCDO, 1999). Certainly, the lifestyles of LMC'ers demand less in terms of consumption than the average person living in the Netherlands. As a whole, it is a drop in the bucket and only contributes to less of an increase in the overall growth of consumption.

The danger is that, if one only considers the view that a large enough number of individual efforts leads to radical change in the structures of society, this view could lead to a neglect of the underlying causes. As Kauffman (1990) says: "as if attitudes rather than vested interests were the primary obstacle to the creation of an ideal society" ( p.78). Conversely, neglecting the importance of attitudes, especially if they result in behavioural change, is just as dangerous. Giddens points out that structure and agency are mutually dependent: structures are both medium and outcome; they are both enabling and constraining (Redclift and Woodgate, 1994:54). Simply put: you can't have one without the other. The viability of the LMC's vision as a practical alternative is limited by its lack of a program that would appeal to large numbers of people. Yet, despite the lack of visible success, or measurable results one can point to, "it is never easy to determine where humanity ends and the workings of social and economic systems begin" (Seabrook, 1993:15).

In focusing on lifestyle issues, there is always the danger that lifestyle becomes a substitute for a political orientation and political activity. Lifestyle changes require a raising of consciousness and awareness. Consciousness-raising, according to Kauffman (1990), is a key element of new political strategies of the New Left. With the rise of the civil rights movement and the feminist movement, a new conception arose: "that the domain of politics need not be confined to the realm of institutions, but could be seen as pervading virtually every aspect of individual and social life" (p.73). Such a politicization of the lifeworld gives political context to lifestyle choices. This is also expressed in Giddens' concept of 'life politics', which "emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal and global survival in late modernity" (Buechler, 1995:461). In the context of identity politics, the politicization of lifestyle choices is first and foremost a form of "organizing around your own oppression" (p.75). The LMC organizes first of all around the principle of solidarity: organization around oppression and exclusion, regardless of whom it affects.

This principle of solidarity, while at the basis of the LMC's ideology, at the same time poses a problem of mobilization. The problems of the third world and hunger are, for most western people, distant in space. Likewise, the consequences of environmental deterioration are distant in time. The effects of the problems the LMC is concerned with have little or no immediate and directly felt impact on the people the LMC wishes to mobilize. Because of the lack of a sense of crisis, actions and policies can be seen as a choice. The known value of what exists can be weighed against the still unknown value of the not yet existing. However, the solutions and changes proposed by the LMC, if followed by the majority of the people, would have immediate and noticeable impacts.

Whether these changes would be experienced as positive by all or most is anyone's guess. Fears of social disruption and the unknown will play a large role in resistance to the radical agenda of the LMC.

Probably the impact of LMC members' consumptive behaviour is negligible in the larger context of western industrialized societies. This does not make their efforts any less valuable. The value of their lifestyle is in its demonstration effect. The significance of voluntary simplicity will ultimately depend on the ability of the lifestyle to gain a much wider appeal. As long as high consumption is experienced by most as rewarding in terms of ease, comfort, enjoyment and effort and cost expended, it is unlikely to gain this wider appeal. A message of 'sober living' and 'less', likewise will not be heard, unless the benefits of such a lifestyle are emphasized. The social and spiritual richness of such a life must be demonstrated and the positive aspects of change clearly spelled out. LMC literature and documentation lacks a conceptualization of the envisioned society, except in very broad and religious-coloured strokes. The LMC lacks in its contribution to a perception that such a new society is both plausible and attractive. Neither is it successful in contributing to a language to express the desired outcomes. For this it must overcome its traditional roots and imagery, which are grounded in traditional Judeo-Christian concepts. These concepts may be intelligible and easily understood by 'insiders', but do not resonate with an increasingly secularized larger society.

Voluntary simplicity, while a preliminary condition to make political and structural change possible, must therefore be wedded to political and structural change. Personal transformation is neither sufficient, nor is it always possible, given the structural constraints on choices available. (Ironically, the emphasis on personal change, personal responsibility and choice mirrors the individualized values of neoliberalism). This form of sub-politics, or change from below, must therefore further emphasize the necessity for collective policies and changes in structures.

Well-known economist Hazel Henderson, says: "I deeply believe that human nature is much better than the current economic system *allows it to be*" (Ekachai and Achakulwisut, 1999; emphasis added). The sting is in the tail: personal transformation will not be sufficient unless there is also a transformation of the system. To transform the project of voluntary choice to a social project and collective policy, material instruments are necessary. While private internalization might be a necessary condition for changes in consumption behaviour, such a moralization of the citizen will most likely not be sufficient. The difficulty of bringing values into line with actual behaviour is also a function of structural constraints on behaviour. One might be convinced of the necessity of buying more durable, repairable goods, but where does one find them and where does one find a repair person? Achterhuis (discussed in CPB, 1996:49) pleads for a 'moralization of instruments'. By this he means that if a moral internalization of sustainability principles by citizens is not possible, or if it is not possible to reach this objective in a certain timespan, then the material environment must be moralized. The material environment or the instruments must, in fact, invite sustainable behaviour. Such an invitation to sustainable behaviour could, for example, be extended by infrastructures that invite the use of public transportation, rather than private cars. Because the material environment is used to create 'draagvlak', one could speak of internalization via the material environment. As long as the citizen receives contradictory signals, such as advertising calling for more consumption, and environmental and justice movements calls for restraint, internalization of personal behaviour change is not likely. Such an internalization of sustainability principles via the material environment would combine the 'soft' and 'hard' paths to different behaviour. It would further relieve the individual of all the responsibility and place a large part of the responsibility with the structures that maintain the current way of doing things. Perhaps the social project of self-limitation Gorz advocates could then be more appropriately called a project of social-limitation.

This is not to say that there is no place for a voluntary approach to restraint, or self-limitation. Practitioners of voluntary simplicity and members of the LMC provide exemplars of the benefits gained by changes in the mode and volume of consumption. But it must always be remembered that their lifestyle is a choice, which they have the power to make, at least in as far as structures allow them to. I would suggest that their most important role lies in the motivations for the choices they make: the needs of the 1.1 billion desperate and the 3.3 billion managing poor (Schroyer, 1999).

### *The work of change and the role of religion*

The most important contribution the LMC makes to the debate about an alternative, just and sustainable future is, I would suggest, as an agent of social learning and a contributor to the dissemination of knowledge, and as a lived example of an alternative way of life. It provides a forum for a coalition of like-minded experts and adherents, to help realize a certain goal. They further contribute to 'stretching the playing field' on which policy decisions are made, by attempting to place alternative scenarios on the agenda. An example of this is the work done by Goudzwaard on the scenario of an ‘economy of enough’ and the role of the LMC members in attempts to put this scenario into practice. In this sense, the LMC contributes to processes prior to future change.

At a personal level, it provides members with a way to close the gap between values and behaviour and to implement the essential unity of their faith and action. This repoliticization of the biblical message allows members to lead a political life, in a society where the influence of Christian politics is in decline. The message of solidarity with the suffering of the poor, flowing from this repoliticization of the biblical message is one of the most important motivating factors for the LMC. The understanding of the connections between ecologically destructive modes of high consumption in the industrialized nations and the continued deprivation of the poor, is an important contribution to the dialogue of sustainability, and one of the fields on which religious organizations may have the most to contribute.

The LMC cannot do this on its own. It is now involved in the maintenance of the movement as an end in itself and does not have the energy, nor the manpower to broaden their program. A possible option might be for them to join Kairos Europe. Within this larger, more active group they may yet contribute to placing alternatives on a wider agenda and further contribute to social learning.

### *Critique of the movement*

The failure of the LMC to attract more members and especially the younger generations, I would suggest, is in its somewhat negative, rather reformed, approach of “Thou shalt not”. The emphasis in its literature is on what is wrong in the world, and on what a person should not do, in order to correct the wrongs. A more positive approach, an emphasis on the attractiveness of a simple life, and the benefits to the environment would possibly help generate more interest. Economic pressures on individuals' sense of time, or lack of time for the enjoyment of life, might be a way to emphasize the benefits of a less pressured existence. The movement further shows a rather uncritical acceptance of every dire prediction, even if the scientific evidence is ambivalent. The Calvinist tendency to discuss everything at length and in depth, at times also leads to a paralysis of action.

A more serious criticism is that the LMC, in my opinion, has failed to show how a lowering of consumption in the West will benefit the poor, either in the Netherlands or in the Third World. Members use their personal options to invest money saved by simple living in development projects, or green funds, but this is again an individual choice. The movement's ideology lacks an analysis of mechanisms which would redirect the financial space created by less consumption in the western world.

Despite these criticisms, I see the LMC as a positive example of a group of people who attempt to practice what they believe in mainstream society. So often abstract theories fail to work out the implications of the theory. Neither does theory very often contribute to, or illuminate, the struggles to translate ideals into action. The description I have offered of the LMC is an example of this courageous struggle.

### *Research implications and theoretical advancement*

The study of global environmental change and sustainability has been focused on supply-side issues, predominantly production systems and has not paid very much attention to demand-side issues, such as consumption (Sklair, 1994:221, 222). Some research is now being done, for example a study by Wolfgang Sachs and his team from the Wupperthal Institute in Germany, on *Greening the North* (1998). If a normative dimension of sufficiency is to be established, or cultural limits are to be created, an understanding of the cultural and social dimensions and preconditions for such a change must be in place. Voluntary attempts at establishing a norm of sufficiency and limits are useful, but insufficient. This would mean a need for policies and structural change. Research in this area would contribute immensely to the understanding of the bases on which such policies may be made.

Further examination of experimental forms of social organization and material practice would contribute to an understanding of the forms and practices that will contribute towards a more just and sustainable future.

Theoretically, the importance of religious beliefs and values is often neglected in analyses of social movements. It is possibly further neglected in research on motivations for choices people make in everyday life. Theoretical advancement may be made by paying more attention to this dimension of motivation.

While research and theories on the production side of sustainable development is plentiful, research and theories on the consumption side of this question is relatively neglected. It is hoped that this study of an example of a group that has begun to make voluntary changes in its consumptive behaviour, may contribute to an understanding of the question of consumption.

### *Final thoughts*

I leave this study with an increased appreciation of the complexity of the issues raised. I also leave this study with a great appreciation of the people I met and the integrity with which they conduct their lives. Seabrook (1993) sums up my assessment of the LMC better than I could:

> Their vision and energies tend towards the definition of an alternative view of the world, a way out of an accelerating global industrialism that weighs so heavily upon the earth and upon its poorest people. The decay of Communism appears to leave uncontested the patterns of development determined by the West, which now offers its advice and prescriptions to the whole world. This is however, an illusion: not only are alternatives vitally necessary, they also exist, coherent, hopeful and ready to release people from the immobilism, despair and violence which accompany the spread of industrialism. (p.vii)

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## APPENDIX 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE

*Personal information:*

Name
Age
Occupation
Education
Married? Children? At home?
Are you a member of a church? Which
one?
Are you a member of a political party? Which
one?

*Motivation:*

How did you come to know about the LMC?

Why and how did you become a member?

How long have you been a member?

What did you want to change in your life?

Does everyone in your family participate?

There are many groups that are concerned with the problems in the world. What was different about the LMC?

*Problems:*

Which problems were and are the most important to you?
(Netherlands, Europe, the world)

Activities (daily life and religious):

A) Daily life

What do you do different in your daily life? Exactly?

What does it mean to you (daily) to be culturally disobedient?

How important is the environment to you? What are the most important problems?

What do you do different in your daily life - energy use, pollution, consumption, etc.?

Is there a difference between your consumption pattern and that of others?

Does everyone in your family join in? If not, what do they think of it?

These days, many people invest money. Do you save and/or invest? Do you invest differently? Are you aware of the global connection between investing and poverty in the Third World?

B) Religious:

Do you do anything differently of a religious nature?

Does everyone in your family join in?

*Personal opinion:*

The problems you spoke of earlier: what are the causes of those problems? Why do they occur?

The Netherlands has had and still has Christian political parties for a long time, often in power. Do you see the political party as a way to influence changes? Do you attempt to influence politics and political decisions? How do you do that?

How do you see the role of technology in society? In your own life?

How effective is the LMC in what it attempts to accomplish? How effective are your actions? What do you see as a success(es)? Failure(s)?

Society is becoming more multicultural, with many different ethnicities living together, also in the Netherlands. Is it constricting, or just the opposite, to act from a Western Christian faith?

Is a Biblical approach appropriate for all of society, even for people who do not believe in the Bible?

According to you, what is the most important role for the LMC (and for you as a member of the movement) to enact changes in society?

## APPENDIX 2

## LMC PUBLICATIONS:

*English translations of titles in italics.*

Booklets:

- Het Groene Huishoudboekje A *(The Green Household Booklet A)* **B1**
    1. Afval *(Waste)* **B1-1**
    2. Energie *(Energy)* **B1-2**
    3. Verkeer *(Transportation)* **B1-3**
    4. Voedsel *(Food)* **B1-4**
    5. Water *(Water)* **B1-5**
- Het Groene Huishoudboekje B *(The Green Household Booklet B)* **B2**

  Over de directe leefwereld, buurt of dorp, werkkring, school, kerk, gemeente politiek enz.

  *(About the direct lifeworld, neighbourhood or town, work, school, church, local politics, etc.)*
- Het Groene Huishoudboekje C *(The Green Household Booklet C)* **B3**

  Over het grote verband van het milieu in de landelijke en wereldwijde economie en politiek.

  *(About the connections between environment, national and global economies and politics).*
- Culturele ongehoorzaamheid, anders leven - de weg met toekomst: Gedachten vanuit Psalm 8 **B4**

  *(Cultural disobedience, living differently - the path with a future: Reflections on Psalm 8)*
- Starten van werkgroepen *(Starting of workgroups)* **B5**
- Samen aan het werk *(Working together)* **B6**
- Tienden van onze tijd *(Tenths of our time)* **B7**
- Vasten als oefenmiddel *(Fasting as a means of practice)* **B8**
- Culturele ongehoorzaamheid: Enkele practische suggesties **B9**

  *(Cultural Disobedience: Some practical suggestions)*
- Geweldvrije Weerbaarheid: beginnen aan de Andere Kant **B10**

  *(Non-violent resistance: beginning at the Other Side)*
- Rapport 1996: barre feiten en hernieuwde oproep to culturele ongehoorzaamheid **B11**

  *(Report 1996: bare facts and renewed call to cultural disobedience)*
- Geloof en economie: liturgie voor een themadienst **B12**

  *(Faith and economy: liturgy for a thematic worship service)*
- Het Rode Economieboekje *(The Red Economy Booklet)* **B13**
- Das Rote Haushaltbuch *(German edition of the Red Economy Booklet)* **B14**
- 18 Kleine stapjes naar verandering *(18 Small steps for change)* **B15**
- Sneeuwball Akties *(Snowball actions)* **B16**

Book:

- Kist, A.W. en L. Schuurman 'Culturele Ongehoorzaamheid?: Een oproep tot geloofsvernieuwing en anders leven in deze tijd'. 1986. Franeker: Uitgeverij T. Wever B.V. **B17**

*(Cultural Disobedience?: A call to renewal of faith and living differently in this time).*

Pamphlets:

- Eén oproep en wat daarop volgde *(The call and what followed)* **B18**
- LMC: Een oproep tot culturele ongehoorzaamheid **B19**
  *(LMC: a call to cultural disobedience)*

Bulletins: *(The official bi-monthly publication of the LMC)*
**Indicated by: 'Bulletin' and Number**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Nr. 00 | december 1986 | *(December 1986)* |
| • Nr. 019 | maart/april 1990 | *(March/April 1990)* |
| • Nr. 040 | sept/okt 1993 | *(September/October 1993)* |
| • Nr. 050 | mei/juni 1995 | *(May/June 1995)* |
| • Nr. 062 | mei/juni 1997 | *(May/June 1997)* |
| • Nr. 069 | juli/augustus 1998 | *(July/August 1998)* |
| • Nr. 070 | sept/okt 1998 | *(Sept/Oct 1998)* |
| • Nr. 071 | nov/dec 1998 | *(Nov/Dec 1998)* |
| • Nr. 072 | jan/febr 1999 | *(Jan/Feb 1999)* |
| • Nr. 073 | maart/april 1999 | *(March/April 1999)* |

**LMC Documents:**

D1 Open Letter - 1985 - W.A. Kist

D2 Essay: "Searching for a New Culture" - 1984 - W.A. Kist

D3 Newspaper article in *Hervormd Nederland* - 1986 - Interview with W.A. Kist

D4 Letter to authors of 'Bulletin' meditations - 1988

D5 Letter to National Council of Dutch Reformed Churches

D6 Report: concept of 'dabar' houses 1989

D7 Letter: 'dabar' houses

D8 Report: Consultation with the churches - 1989

D9 Concept brochure - Phase Two - 1998

D10 Report: Suggestions for continuation of LMC

D11 Questionnaire to members

| | |
|---|---|
| D12 | Questionnaire to members - 1998 |
| D13 | Letter to members - 1998 |
| D14 | Information letter, re: Bulletin subscriptions |
| D15 | Letter, re: annual meeting November 1998 |
| D16 | Essay: "Why keep the Wednesday?" |
| D17 | List of members of the steering committee (WOD) 1998 |
| D18 | Invitation to annual meeting 1988 |
| D19 | Invitation to annual meeting 1992 |
| D20 | Report - annual meeting 1992 |
| D21 | Program - annual meeting 1990 |
| D22 | Report - annual meeting 1990 |
| D23 | Report from WOD - possibilities for action foci - 1998 |
| D24 | Concept letter to Churches - snowball action - fasting in solidarity with Eastern Europe - 1993 |
| D25 | Second concept letter (as above) |
| D26 | Letter to members, re: snowball action - poverty in the Netherlands - 1992 |
| D27 | Concept letter to members of Parliament - snowball action - aid money to Eastern Europe - 1991 |
| D28 | Reply to D27 from Christian Democratic Party |
| D29 | Reply to D27 from Christian Democratic member of Parliament |
| D30 | Concept letter, re: snowball action - support for Eastern Europe - 1989 |
| D31 | Second concept letter (as above) |
| D32 | Reply to D30 from Labour Party |
| D33 | Reply to snowball letter, re: Iraq from Ministry of Foreign Affairs - 1991 |
| D34 | Reply to snowball letter, re: Iraq from Labour Party Caucus - 1991 |
| D35 | Reply to snowball letter, re: Iraq from Liberal Party - 1991 |
| D36 | Concept letter, re: snowball action - South Africa |
| D37 | Speech to annual meeting 1998 - W.A. Kist |
| D38 | European Kairos letter - call for support - 1998 |
| D39 | Agenda - Meeting of WOD - March 18, 1999 |

| | |
|---|---|
| D40 | Newspaper article in *Trouw* - "Time for cultural disobedience" - J. Bakker |
| D41 | Essay: "The Debtcrisis: Origins and Solutions" - 1990 |
| D42 | Report - Annual meeting - 1989 |
| D43 | Minutes - WOD meeting - March 18, 1999 |
| D44 | Essay: "What's it all about?" (non-violent resistance) - H. Meijboom - 1997 |
| D45 | Newspaper article in *Trouw* - Interview with A.W. Kist - March 15, 1986 |
| D46 | Report: Five Years LMC - 1991 |
| D47 | Report 1996 - Ten Years LMC |
| | |
| N | Personal research notes |

**Interviews:**

| | |
|---|---|
| I 1 | Jaap Van der Sar, Kerk en Wereld *(Church and World)* |
| I 2 | Geri van Nieuwkoop, Milieudefensie *(Friends of the Earth Netherlands)* |
| I 3 | Daan van Heere, Kerk en Milieu *(Church and Environment)* |
| I 4 | A.W. Kist, initiator and leader of the LMC - orientation interview |
| I 5 | A.W. Kist and Els Kist - in-depth interview |
| I 6 | Hans J. Bakker, LMC member |
| I 7 | Nel Baart, LMC member |
| I 8 | Co Baart, former WOD member |
| I 9 | Joop Jansen, former WOD member |
| I 10 | Ans Tichelman, LMC member |
| I 11 | Rennie Algra, LMC member |
| I 12 | Sietje van Dam, LMC member |
| I 13 | Addie Sonneveld, LMC member |
| I 14 | Cees Cooijmans, LMC member |
| I 15 | Dyanne Schrauwen, LMC member |
| I 16 | Piet Haanemaaijer, LMC member |

**Questionnaires:**

**Numbered from Q1 to Q15**